HOW TO MAKE CASH MONEY SELLING AT SWAP MEETS, FLEA MARKETS, ETC.

Jordan L. Cooper

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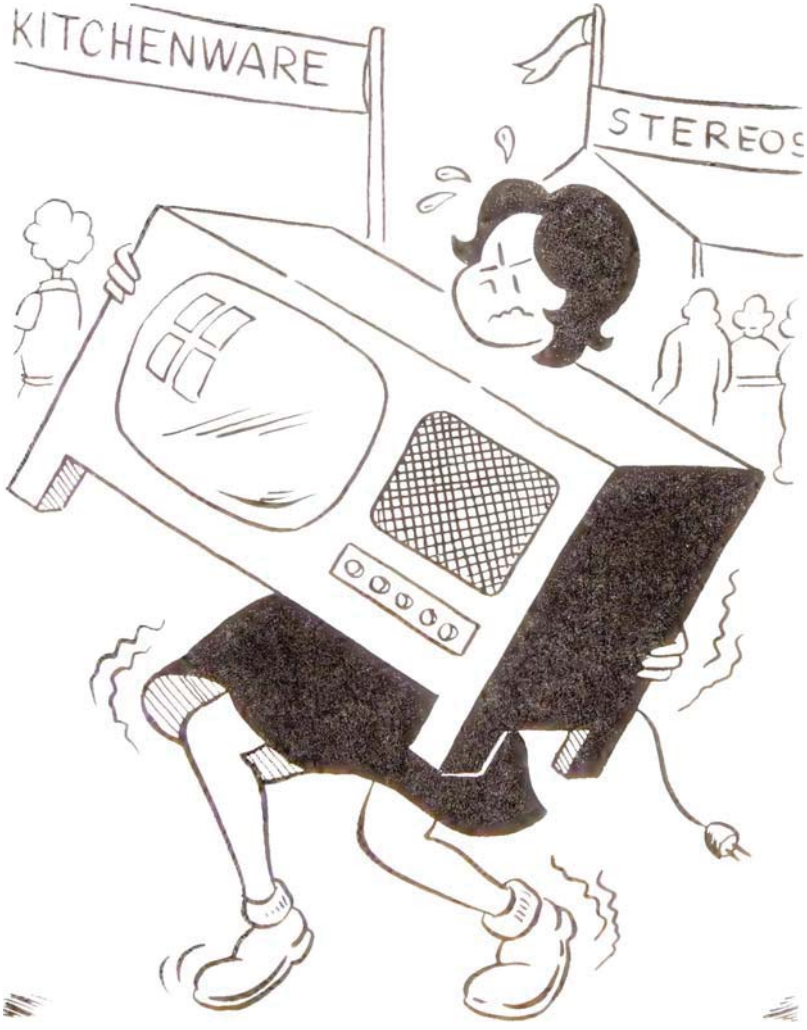
To Chuck and Clairice

God broke the molds after He made you two. Here's hoping for many more successful seasons together.

INTRODUCTION



Whether called swap meets or flea markets, these unique outdoor/indoor markets are big business. Many of the larger ones generate incredible sums of money for the local economy. One market with which I am familiar grossed $12.5 million last year in customer admissions,

parking fees and space rental to dealers. Just how much money exchanged hands between customers and dealers isn't known. It has to be considerably more than the above figure. Add up the number of markets in the U.S. (thousands, with well over 200 in Texas alone) and sales figures for them all must easily run into the billions of dollars. Since most markets in large urban areas require vendors to charge sales tax, they are also a major source of revenue for state and local governments.

Actually, the terms swap meet and flea market are both misnomers, at least today. Very little trading goes on at swap meets. It's mostly buying and selling. The term flea market does, however, have a valid origin in the past. It is a translation from the French for an open-air market that started in Paris around 1922. At that time, a lot of used clothing and furniture which was offered for sale *did* have a resident flea population. This was because they had been stored in barns and attics for years prior to being offered for sale. Although I have yet to see anyone actually selling fleas at flea markets, some of the visiting dogs and cats are probably well supplied with them.

Personally, I can't stand the term flea market. To me, it connotates a bunch of scruffy looking characters driving rattletrap cars and trying to sell junk which should actually be thrown away. The term swap meet conjures up visions of a high percentage of professional dealers selling new, first quality merchandise.

These reactions are based on firsthand experience. It seems that if I set up to sell at Big Frankie's Flea Market, sales are miserable. However, if I pick Big Frankie's Swap Meet instead, sales increase dramatically. This isn't a hard and fast rule, but generally it has held true.

Regionally, the term flea market seems to prevail in the South and East while swap meet is more common in the West, regardless of market size and merchandise being offered. Indeed, there are many large, professionally managed flea markets in the East which are a credit to the profession. The vast majority of vendors are professionals and these markets attract a good, middle-class clientele. Less frequently encountered phrases are stop 'n' swap or park 'n' swap. Call them what you will, but for the reasons listed above I'll use the term swap meet throughout this volume.

Just when and where the first American swap meet was held is anybody's guess, but there are some still operating today that date from the 1930's. They are now run by the grandchildren of the founders. They are often institutions in their local areas. Some originated as farmer's markets. Others were conceived as a means of making a little extra money from drive-in theaters during the daylight hours. Whatever their origins, by the late 1960's they were big business throughout the country.

Open-air markets in one form or another are probably as old as civilization itself. One can easily picture a farmer in ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia trading his produce for the skilled artisan's goods that he needed. Market Day was a big social and economic affair in Medieval Europe. It is still quite common in Third World countries today.

Although the early markets relied heavily on the barter system, swap meets are strictly a cash-and-carry proposition. This is true whether the vendor is a one-timer cleaning out his garage or a professional who makes his living working the swap meet circuit. Make no mistake about it, it's possible to earn a very good living with the right product in the right location.

Customers like swap meets for a number of reasons. They can get some fresh air and sunshine while shopping. There is usually a wide selection of merchandise, with numerous bargains to be had. This is true even with the new merchandise. I know of one vendor who sells a certain item for $37.50, which allows him a decent profit. In swank gift shops and tourist traps just a few miles away, the same item sells for $195. No wonder people shop the swap meets!

There are numerous books on the market describing how to turn little or no investment into enormous profits in a very short time. Some of these methods of creative financing actually work, but instant success isn't guaranteed. For every guy who has made a million in real estate, the stock market or precious metals, there is another who has lost everything. Timing, a knowledge of such markets, plus a little "savvy" are necessary to ensure success. If you don't know what you are doing in a market, stay out of it. Let the big boys gamble for the solid gold Kewpie doll.

Swap meets, on the other hand, offer the average man on the street a chance to start his own business with a minimum of risk and investment. There are very, very few large profits to be made overnight. However, it *is* possible to show a small profit the very first day and have that profit grow from day to day. Very few retail stores show a profit that quickly. Many are lucky if they break even during the first year, mainly due to high overhead.

Quite frankly, I can't simply hand you the magic formula and say, "Do this and you will be a millionaire by Christmas." Such a formula just doesn't exist, although I will give you one that comes close. However, I *can* point out some pitfalls to avoid as well as some things to do at the outset which should tip the odds in

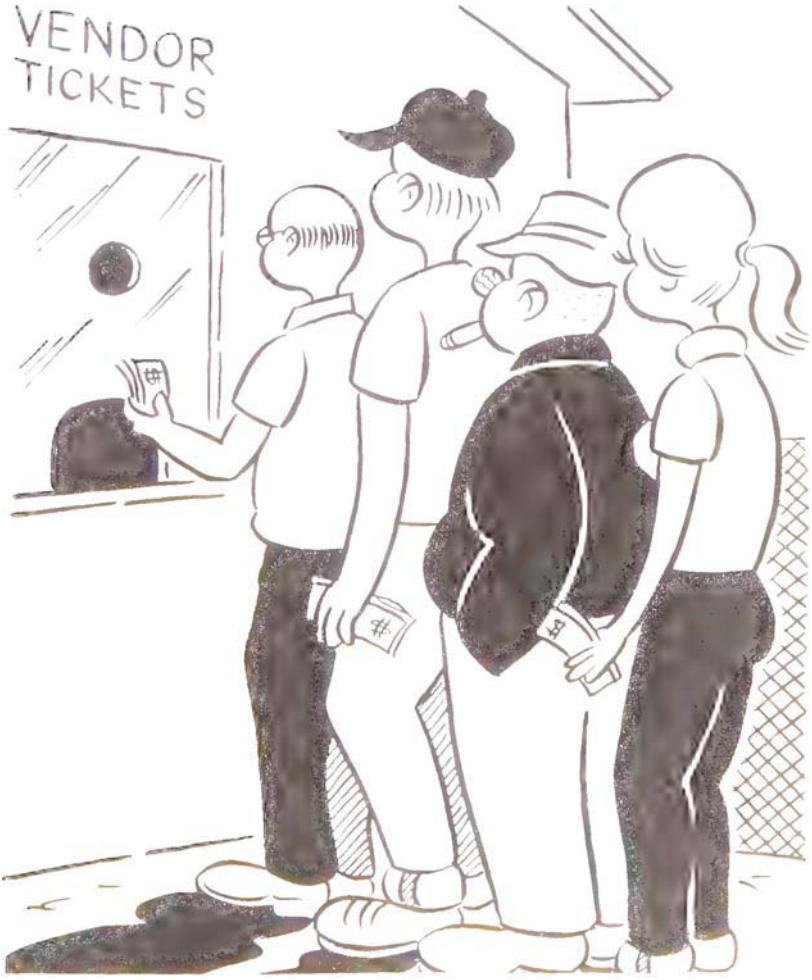
your favor. These methods have worked well for others. There is no reason why they shouldn't work for you. To be forewarned as to what may or may not work is to be forearmed, so take time to plan ahead *before* laying out hard-earned money for merchandise.

Many readers will be regular swap meet customers who have no intention of becoming a professional vendor. This book will give you some insights into just how swap meets operate. There is also a chapter devoted strictly to the customer. It contains some helpful hints for shopping as well as some do's and don'ts which should make both your day and the vendor's a more pleasant and profitable one.

Please bear with me if, from time to time, I suddenly switch from a first-person to a third-person narrative, or address certain passages directly to you, the reader. Some information is better imparted in one style than another. My goal is to present the information which follows in as simple and understandable a method as possible, not earn an A+ in English Composition.

Jordan L. Cooper
November 1987

PROFILE OF A SWAP MEET VENDOR



According to my wife, there are two types of swap meet vendors: retired military and middle-aged, laid off.

Although this statement is a gross oversimplification, it does present at least a part of the picture. Literally thousands of retirees have discovered that swap meets

are an excellent way to supplement a retirement income. As one newly retired vendor put it, "I've got my retirement, but I need additional income to help put my youngest daughter through college. I could go out and get another 9:00 to 5:00 job, but I feel like I've lived that way long enough. I can make money at swap meets, and only have to work a couple of days a week."

Many vendors fall into the middle-aged, laid-off, can't-find-a-job category. I am a member of this group. When I found myself suddenly and unexpectedly out of work some time ago, my wife and I began looking for ways to bring in some extra money until I found another job. First we held a yard sale, then we took the leftover items to the local swap meet. In one day's time we took in several hundred dollars.

Over the next few weeks, I continued to look for work in the surrounding area during the week, then headed for the swap meet on Saturdays and Sundays. I soon discovered there were people making a living, and often a good one, as professional vendors. One man I met hadn't worked at a regular job since the 1970's. He had managed to keep a roof over his head and put food on the table repairing and selling discarded bicycles that he picked up in alleys in a large city nearby.

As my search for work proved fruitless, my wife and I began considering swap meets as an alternative to my finding a job. It was a move of desperation at the time, but in the long run taking the plunge proved a blessing in disguise. As I look over our sales figures for last spring, I realize our profit for one particular weekend exceeded an entire month's salary at my former job! Such profitable weekends are the exception, of course, but they *do* happen.

Some vendors work during the week, then set up at swap meets on weekends, and have been doing it for

years. Their swap meet income is their security blanket in case they are handed a pink slip some Friday afternoon. It also provides extra income to allow a few luxuries for the family. Yet other vendors are simply holding onto their jobs until they build their business up to the point where it will provide them with a decent living, then it's good-bye time clock. One fellow with whom I am acquainted, voluntarily withdrew himself from the work force while in his mid-twenties. He is building up a nice little business which will eventually provide a good income for himself and his family.

A small percentage of professional vendors are artists or craftsmen who sell their own creations. In many cases the spouse does the selling either because the artist is busy demonstrating or lacks selling ability. Surprisingly, few artists are good at selling their own work. While it's common to think of them as egotistical, the opposite is often the case. They feel very shy about asking people to pay out good money for their work. One outstanding example of this trait was the great Western artist, Charles M. Russell. When he was single, he was content to take his paintings down to his favorite saloon and trade them for drinks for the house. After he married, his wife soon put a stop to that practice. Thanks to her salesmanship and business acumen, Russell was a wealthy man when he died.

From time to time, I will discuss the merits of working swap meets vs. opening a retail store. It may come as a surprise that some merchants actually go both routes at the same time. In one case, the vendor worked swap meets for 20 years before opening a store in a swank resort area. In another, a man who owned 5 stores in a thriving tourist area went the swap meet route simply as an excuse to spend his winters in the Sun Belt. He had very high class merchandise and chose his markets

carefully, so it was no coincidence that he did extremely well all winter. Yet another fellow is literally a multi-millionaire, owning several bars and well over a dozen specialty stores. He occasionally works a particularly lucrative swap meet some distance from his home simply because he enjoys it.

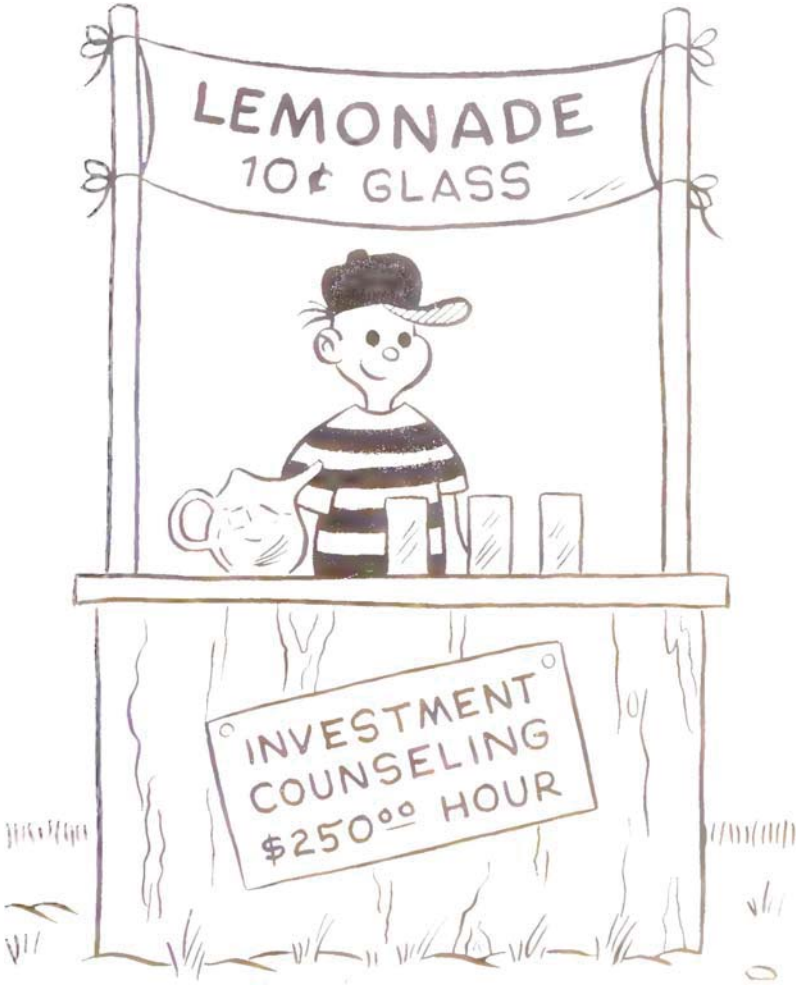
While some vendors work the same market year-around, others will change markets from season to season or even more often if they are in the mood to travel. Even if you aren't in the same market all year, it's possible to build a good repeat business from one season to another. When we first started our business, my wife and I got in on the last three prime selling weekends of a good little market in Southern Arizona. By the third weekend, we had already sold to several customers who were referred to us by friends. When the snowbirds headed North, so did we. Within weeks after our return in the fall, we had customers from the previous spring looking for us. We did very well in that market throughout the winter and well into spring, with numerous repeat customers.

Some vendors are retirees who live full-time in an RV and spend the entire year traveling about the country. They set up at whatever market happens to be in a given area. This enables them to see the country and help defray travel expenses at the same time. Such people can be a gold mine of information about markets in other areas. Although there are swap meet directories published for the trade, they don't always tell the whole story. A market which looks good on paper may not be that lucrative for a particular type of merchandise. Another tiny market which isn't even listed could be highly profitable. Whenever one of these highly mobile vendors tells you about a good little market someplace, grab your notebook and pencil and jot down whatever information he or she has to offer for future reference.

Generally speaking, vendors who are permanent residents of their market area will reflect the demographics of that area. In other words, retiree vendors will be quite common in winter resort areas in the Sun Belt. Hispanic or Oriental vendors will dominate certain markets in Southern California. Expect to find a bunch of good ol' boys working the smaller markets in rural areas. This isn't a cut-and-dried rule, of course, but merely reflects the norm. A market located in an urban area of Yuppies will probably have a greater percentage of younger vendors than retirees.

In summary, with the exception of an extraordinarily high percentage of retirees, the average swap meet vendor actually represents a fairly typical cross section of the population for any given area. However, they have a few common traits which are not common to the population in general. In age, they will range from the late thirties to well in the seventies. Most are of a mobile nature, owning a camper, travel trailer or motor home. If they do have a fixed address, it will likely be a mobile home or large travel trailer in a park. The vast majority are very congenial and are more than willing to share information on good markets. They are fairly independent by nature and generally have an optimistic outlook on life. If they had a bad day yesterday, they still greet you with a smile and say they expect today to be much better.

OWN YOUR OWN BUSINESS



"Make 35¢ an hour braiding buggy whips."

"Own your own business! Make up to $7.95 per hour cleaning carpeting & upholstery."

"I made $4,000 my first week selling engine steam cleaning kits to local garages."

"10,001 ways to make millions before Christmas"

Such ads as those above, or some variation on the same themes, are probably as old as advertising itself. To the millions of Americans working in low-paying jobs, dead-end, warm-body jobs, they offer the American Dream, a chance to make big money and own their own business. After years of working hard and making just enough money to pay the bills and put food on the table, who wouldn't want a chance to improve their lot? Your friendly local ad copy man knows this and words the ads accordingly. He makes it easy for you to substitute yourself and your spouse for the smiling young couple standing in front of the Rolls-Royce in the picture at the top of the full page ad. After all, they hit it big in just six months, so why shouldn't you? Sure, it's possible, but it's also highly improbable.

Place yourself in the advertiser's shoes and ask what his actual motives are. If you had inside information on how to make a fortune in a short time, would you advertise it? Not too likely, at least until after you had already made your bundle and knew you weren't likely to make much more. You might share your secret with your family and friends, but you wouldn't exactly shout it to the world in general unless you stood to make even more money doing just that.

Whether it's a product or a correspondence course, most of the promoters make their money by selling it to you, not by selling directly themselves. Some correspondence courses are actually a pretty good deal, as the knowledge you gain can help you get a better job or supplement your income by moonlighting. But don't expect to become a millionaire after receiving your diploma. Sorry to burst the bubble, but that method of achieving the American Dream just went up in smoke.

Another prime example of how *not* to get rich quick is the pyramid scheme. These are supposedly illegal, but they still exist if only under another name, such as multi-level marketing. They sell everything from vitamins and automotive additives to household gadgets. Usually their product is of pretty good quality, but by the time each level of sales gets its commission and overrides, the product is priced too high to be competitive.

Here's how these schemes usually work:

A company representative holds weekly meetings in which the product is extolled and a glossy videotape presentation is shown. After the TV screen goes dark and the lights go back on, Mr. Smiling Face recounts the success stories of a few people who got in on the ground floor. He tells in glowing terms how Joe Blow, a poorly paid production worker for Malicious Manufacturing went from rags to riches in just a few short months. Joe attended one of the company's first sales meetings. With a small initial investment in the product, he became a dealer. In addition to direct selling, Joe was encouraged to sign up 10 more dealers, which would make him a distributor. If his 10 dealers each signed up 10 more dealers, they would become distributors and Joe would then become district manager. In other words, the more people Joe signed up, the higher he would climb in the sales structure and the more money he would make in commissions, bonuses and overrides. After achieving a certain level, the company would even furnish him a luxury car to drive.

About the time the audience is thoroughly confused by all this mumbo-jumbo, the salesmen will hand out photocopies of commission checks supposedly (or maybe actually) paid out to Joe. "You want to know how much money you can make?" he asks. "Well, just look at this! In January, Joe had just gotten started, so his

check for that month was only $16.39. In February, he really began selling, so he made $382.50, just working part-time. By March, he had moved up to a distributorship, so his check was for $2,082. But, wow, look at April! Joe cashed a check for $17,432. How many of you sitting out there tonight could use that kind of money?

Naturally, the more gullible members of the audience begin to envision a lifestyle such as Joe must now have. If he could do it, why can't they?

Although that's not his real name, Joe *is* a real person and he *did* make megabucks that first year, well over a half million dollars. Unfortunately, in the second year the government shut down this pyramid scheme. Joe lost his new home by the country club and his private airplane. He's now back on the production line and in *big* trouble with the IRS over back taxes owed. Actually, Joe's former neighbor fared far better in the deal. He only had trouble selling his merchandise as he was the 329th dealer signed up in a town with a population of 4,000.

Pyramid schemes should *not* be confused with legitimate marketing concepts such as Avon, Amway, Fuller Brush, etc. These companies have been in business for years, offering excellent products at competitive prices. Chances are your wife's Avon lady is the same one she had years ago. You can make money selling their products, but you will never get rich.

There are many success stories of people who have become wealthy off fast food franchises. The name association alone will almost ensure success. However, the cost of the franchise usually puts it well out of reach of the average person wanting to start his own business. Add on the cost of a building and land and they become affordable only to the privileged few.

For the person who is willing to work hard and doesn't expect instant riches, it's still possible to start a profitable business with only a modest investment. Many people think in terms of a storefront when starting a small business. That's okay if you can afford it and really need it, but often the extra costs involved are what can make the business fail rather than succeed. It costs a small fortune to start a laundromat, gift shop or print shop, for instance. While such businesses *can* be little gold mines, they can also be a millstone around your neck. High rent, employee salaries, high interest rates for the loan to get started, etc., can quickly eat up any profits. On the other hand, a janitorial service can be started on a shoestring and can make money right from the start. Such services are always in demand. So are lawn care services. All that's needed to start is a car or pickup, rake, lawnmower and some large trash bags.

If retail sales is more up your alley, you would do well to consider working swap meets rather than opening a store. The initial costs are much lower, and you can always open a store later.

Some of the advantages to working swap meets as a regular vendor are:

a) Low initial investment.

b) Can be done part-time to start while holding a regular job.

c) Low overhead as compared to a storefront.

d) High traffic pattern of potential customers.

e) Be your own boss.

f) Live wherever you like, as long as there is a good market nearby.

g) The opportunity to travel, as you aren't tied to one market unless you wish, or have children in school.

h) Certain tax advantages due to write-offs against the business.

i) Equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, creed, color, age, etc.

Let's look at these advantages individually in more detail:

a) A *low initial investment* is one of the strongest advantages to being a swap meet vendor. My wife and I started our present business on a grand total of $43.75, plus $6.50 for space rent the first day. We made it all back, plus grocery money, that afternoon. From that humble beginning, we invested as much as we possibly could right back into the business. As our inventory grew, so did our sales. We are now making a comfortable living, although we occasionally still have the cash flow problems so common to any new small business. However, this can be an even bigger problem for larger, well-established businesses. It's just one of the risks you take when you are in business for yourself.

b) Being able to work swap meets on weekends while still maintaining a regular Monday through Friday job is an advantage that shouldn't be overlooked. If business is slow at first, you will still be able to eat and pay the bills. Once your after-expenses swap meet income matches or exceeds your regular paycheck, you will begin to wonder why you worked for wages for so many years.

c) The difference in overhead between swap meets and a storefront is so great as to be downright ridiculous. For swap meets you have only your space rent (as little as $2 per space per day in some areas) and gas to and from the market. With a store you have rent, utilities and merchants'

association dues. Depending on how the lease is written, you might even have to pay a percentage of your gross to the landlord. Last but not least, store fixtures can cost several times as much as your merchandise

d) One of the main keys to success in retailing is foot traffic. Many small shops in out-of-the-way locations may have only a couple of dozen people come through the doors each day. If the shop is located in a shopping center, the number of people walking by will be much greater, but that doesn't necessarily mean they will take the time to come in. At a really good swap meet, the number of people who pass by a vendor's stall can literally run into the thousands on a busy day. Most tend to at least stop long enough to glance at a vendor's merchandise. If it is appealing enough, several hundred may stop to browse. Each one is a potential customer

e) Being your own boss is one of the major appeals of owning a business. Sure, you get all the headaches, but you also reap all the profits. Some people just aren't emotionally suited for working for the other guy, yet function quite well on their own. If they have any business sense at all, they should definitely be in business for themselves.

f) Living wherever you want can be a big plus. Let's say you want to live in Houston, but your regular job skills aren't in demand there. As a swap meet vendor, you create your own job. The only drawbacks may be that you would need to be close to relatives or sources of supply (more on this in the next chapter). Such conditions might dictate that you would have to live in Atlanta or Denver instead, whether you wanted to or not

g) Many people like to travel, but are limited to two weeks a year because they are tied down by a regular job. A swap meet vendor can, on the other hand, work the Sun Belt in the winter, then head for the mountains in the summer. Additionally, he or she has the opportunity to visit a lot of places they would never see otherwise. Remember the full-time RVers in the last chapter. In one year's travel they can see more places than the average person sees in a lifetime. However, it's important to watch travel expenses if you are actually trying to make a living out of swap meets. They can quickly offset any profit you might realize if business is bad.

h) The tax advantages of owning a business are many and will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. Remember, it's the average middle-class American working for a paycheck who gets the shaft on April 15th. Many millionaires pay little or no income tax each year — legally.

i) Theoretically it's against the law to discriminate in hiring because of race, sex, age, etc. In actual fact, it happens all the time and employers get away with it often enough because they can invent some "legitimate" reason for not hiring a particular member of a minority. As a swap meet vendor, you have the opportunity to succeed or fail strictly on your own merit. I have seen very, very little prejudice at swap meets. My favorite market happens to be in an ultra-conservative, predominantly WASP area. Yet the successful vendors include Blacks, Hispanics, Orientals, American Indians, Asiatic Indians, Arabs, Jews and Caucasians of every ethnic background imaginable. No matter what the Equal Rights Amendment proponents say about discrimination, women enjoy a distinct

advantage when selling certain types of merchandise, and I don't mean just foundation garments and cosmetics!

Just as there are advantages to being a swap meet vendor, there are also disadvantages when choosing between that route and a retail store. Some of the more important ones are:

a) *The weather.* This subject is a biggy and will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter.

b) *Lack of prestige.* (So you don't have a fancy location in Megabucks Mall. Big deal, unless your ego is more important than your pocketbook.)

c) *Bad image.* Some people believe swap meet vendors are gypsies with no permanent address or sense of responsibility who are dodging the IRS. This is true of some, but they are a small minority. Most are responsible citizens who just happen to be a little more independent than the average guy. Some dealers have been caught selling stolen goods, bootleg tapes or counterfeits of name brand merchandise. Again, these are in the minority and some of them were unaware that their merchandise wasn't genuine. Most dealers are quite reputable, especially if they work the same location year after year. Their business depends on it. More on this subject in the next chapter

d) *Hard to get credit for merchandise.* It's a fact of life that most vendors are on a cash-and-carry basis with their suppliers. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least being the gypsy image listed above. However, many vendors actually *prefer* to pay up front, just as some store owners do. Some suppliers expect to be paid immediately upon delivery of the merchandise. This is especially true of American Indians and others who

produce handcrafted items. Most of these craftsmen operate on a small scale and quite frankly need the money for next week's groceries.

At the opposite end of the scale, there are wholesalers who will bend over backwards to accommodate a swap meet vendor who is a major account. In one case, the supplier had a surplus that he wanted to clear out of the warehouse. He simply shipped it to one of his biggest clients, then called and explained the situation. "I just sent you $20,000 worth of such-and-such that you didn't order," he said. "I won't bill you for it, just send me a check when the stuff sells." Of course, the supplier knew that particular vendor would probably be able to sell the merchandise much more quickly than any other dealer, so he wouldn't have to wait long for his money.

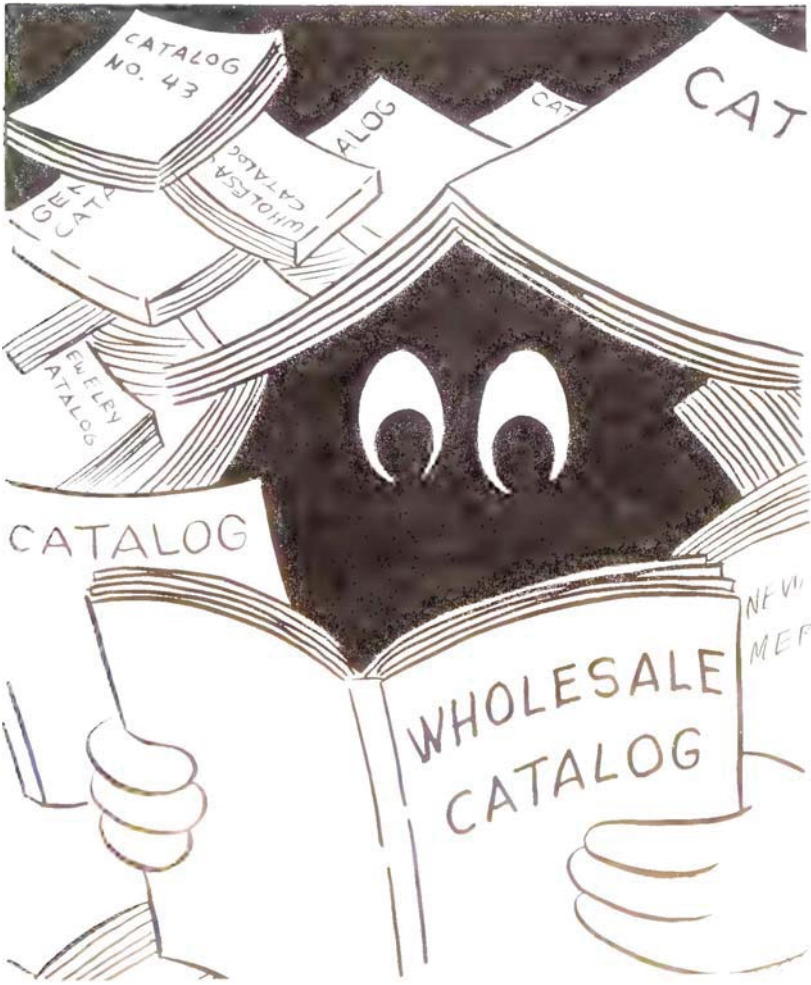
When a good friend of mine first started selling at swap meets, he always sent a check with his order. Business was good, and he found it necessary to restock every week, but deliveries soon fell behind. He asked his supplier if it would be possible to order on credit as he hated to have his money tied up with no merchandise to sell. He was immediately given the option of becoming a 30-day or 60-day account with no credit check necessary. The supplier's reasoning was simple: that particular vendor had quickly become her biggest account and she knew his checks were good. She didn't want to lose his business and even threatened to cut off a much older, more prestigious account if necessary in order to supply him. She knew which side her bread was buttered on, and she preferred butter to margarine.

As stated at the start of this chapter, owning a business is a part of the American Dream. Due to lack

of capital, unwillingness to take risks or other factors, few achieve that dream. Working swap meets on weekends affords the average person the chance to start a business with a small investment and little or no risk. If it takes awhile for the business to grow, they still have the security of a weekly paycheck to pay the bills. In a good market, a part-time vendor can make some extra spending money at the very least, or can eventually become a millionaire. It has been done!

Last, but not least, as your own boss you don't have to worry about some so-called "expert" from the home office coming in and screwing up a system that works. A company policy that makes sense for New York City may be disastrous for a store in Possum Hollow, Tennessee. When you own your own business, you *make* the company policy.

SELECTING YOUR MERCHANDISE



In the introduction I stated that there was no magic formula that would guarantee success at swap meets. Actually, there is: be in the right location with the right merchandise at the right price at the right time of year. It sounds so simple, just do four things right and instant

success is assured. However, this is easier said than done. Doing three things right and one wrong can spell disaster. Scuba diving gear and surfboards might sell well in Southern California or Florida, but they would definitely be a lost cause in Wyoming. Don't expect to sell down-filled jackets in Phoenix or Palm Springs in July. Ghetto blasters should do well in areas which have a high density of teenagers, but they won't be popular in a retirement community.

Since your first venture into the swap meet business will undoubtedly be close to home, visit the local market for a little reconnaissance. If there are several swap meets in your area, visit them all. Even if they are within a few miles of each other, you will notice a vast difference in the types of merchandise being sold, and the clientele. Does most of the merchandise look like it belongs on a carnival midway, or are there a number of vendors with high ticket items? Are most of the crowd retirees, well-dressed Yuppies or poorly-dressed young people with several small children? Is there one dealer selling baseball caps, or a dozen? How many sell used golf clubs? Does anyone at all sell pet supplies?

The answers to all the above questions will help determine if the item you would like to sell might do well in that market or if the market itself is right for you. If most of the clientele is young people with babies and small children, take note of whether there is anyone selling baby strollers, cribs, little red wagons and tricycles. If not, you may have the winning combination in the preceding sentence. Green fees on golf courses aren't cheap, so if several vendors sell used golf clubs, it's a good bet a large percentage of the crowd has a better than average income. Yuppies will pay the price for a Rolex wrist watch while a day laborer with three kids may not be able to afford a Timex. However, some high ticket items like color TVs, VCRs, and stereos will

sell in low income areas. These are status symbols that everyone wants and people will save their money to buy them.

If you notice a particular item is conspicuously missing in a certain market, it's for one of five reasons: 1) Nobody has thought of it yet; 2) Somebody tried it and it didn't sell; 3) It's the wrong season; 4) It's illegal; 5) It may be legal, but the management won't allow it.

The first two reasons are worth checking further while the third should be self-explanatory. The fourth and fifth deserve further discussion.

State and local laws will vary, but some items such as drugs, over-the-counter machine guns and explosives will obviously be *verboten* at any swap meet. Some states prohibit the sales of guns and ammunition or martial arts supplies while others permit them. Sales of alcoholic beverages are usually confined to licensed concessionaires. Prohibitions on sales of certain items by the management may include any or all of the following: firearms, sex-related devices, pornography, drug-related items, fireworks, pets and livestock, paramilitary paraphernalia and prepared foods. The latter is understandable since most concession stands are owned by the management, although there are also health regulations to consider.

There are a number of items which are sold at just about every swap meet in the country. Fresh produce is the most outstanding example, as everyone has to eat. Some produce vendors are farmers who grow their own while others buy their merchandise from a wholesale grocer. Jewelry and tools will sell at *any* swap meet. They may not be phenomenal sellers, but they will sell. You will also have close encounters of a constant kind with baseball caps, T-shirts, cassette tapes, brass figurines, cheap toys and watches, bumper stickers,

posters and framed prints, used paperbacks and dozens of other items. The fact that you see them all over the country doesn't necessarily mean they are top sellers, it could mean the vendor is just lacking in imagination. Most simply read the ads in the trade publications and order from large wholesale houses that specialize in selling to swap meet vendors. There is nothing wrong with this, but why follow the crowd and sell what everyone else sells?

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of sources of supply which are *not* being tapped by swap meet vendors. One of the best is local or regional handcrafted items. A visitor from New York or Canada simply loves to take a uniquely Southwestern item home from Arizona. A Texan visiting Alaska isn't likely to buy something he can get at any swap meet in his home state, nor will he look for a stuffed armadillo in the Ozarks. Some vendors actually take regional items to the opposite end of the country and do well with them simply because no one else in the market is selling them.

My wife and I were fortunate in finding just such a handcrafted item when we first went into the business, and it's been the single greatest key to our success. The second key is that we hand select every piece we carry in order to maintain a high standard of quality. It means a 300 mile round trip every week, but sales justify it!

After our initial success, we began looking for other regional items which were not normally found at swap meets. We both walked around with pen and notebook for days, visiting gift shops and tourist traps and talking to the owners or managers. If they had an unusual item that we thought would sell, we would explain to them that we were dealers from a different area who were interested in carrying that particular line. Some wouldn't give us the time of day, but others were

extremely cooperative. A couple of them even gave us extra catalogs they had on file!

A particularly lucrative source for good merchandise is wholesale gift shows. These are not open to the general public but all it takes to be admitted to most is a sales tax number and a business card. In just a few hours' time you can examine literally dozens of lines and talk to the manufacturer's representatives. Some companies won't sell to swap meet vendors. They are afraid it will hurt their sales to swank resort shops and department stores. Others will quickly realize the potential of an untapped market and will be only too happy to sell to you. One lady at the first gift show we attended couldn't bend over backwards fast enough to help us. Her daughter was a professional swap meet vendor, so she *knew* what a good market they could be.

As a result of our research, we now have information on 25 or 30 different lines that show promise. Just when we might add a line or two depends on several factors. These include availability, time of year (Christmas would be ideal), display space available, working capital, etc. All of these lines are of a regional nature or are otherwise unique. None are currently sold at swap meets in our area. In fact, it's doubtful if most vendors even know these lines exist. While not all would make the best seller list, each has merit enough to make it worth carrying. Some months ago, we passed information on several of them on to friends who were thinking of changing merchandise. They listened to our recommendations, then picked the lines we happened to like best ourselves. They more than doubled their average daily gross when they began selling it.

Some of the most successful vendors don't carry a regular line of merchandise and frankly don't know from one week to the next what they will be selling the

following weekend. They aren't simple-minded, disorganized or spaced out on drugs. They are actually very canny, but are unintentional victims of their method of obtaining merchandise. Since they buy at auctions and close-out shows, they have no way to anticipate exactly what they will be selling from one week to the next. Buying at auctions and then reselling in the right market (not necessarily swap meets) could be the subject of a book in itself. In fact, the book has been written and the couple who wrote it conduct seminars on the subject. Since they made over a million dollars in their first year, their advice is well worth heeding.

If you have the cash to buy in large quantities and know how and where to resell, auctions and close-out shows can be excellent sources of merchandise. It's often possible to buy goods at just pennies on the dollar, resell them at well below market value and still make a handsome profit. Some vendors also buy their merchandise at sidewalk sales in shopping malls on Saturday, then resell it at swap meets on Sunday. One fellow who has been in the business for years buys and sells nothing but salesmen's samples of discontinued shoes and clothing. It may not seem like the quickest way to riches, but he makes a comfortable living.

Another source of merchandise is other vendors. Some of the larger ones will wholesale to you. The main drawback to this is that if they can afford to wholesale to you, they can afford to sell to the public at a lower price than you can, and probably will. This has happened numerous times. In one case, a vendor loaded a semi full of merchandise and took it to the swap meet he normally worked. He wholesaled most of his stock to other vendors, then disposed of the remainder by selling it to the public for the same price he had charged his competitors. Needless to say, he didn't make any friends that way.

Beware of "fad" items which have sales potential for only a few weeks or months. They can be profitable if you get in on the ground floor, then bail out just before the market is saturated. In such cases, timing is critical. Last spring, a large mail order firm ran ads on network TV for a certain exercise machine at $19.95. Within weeks, cheap Taiwan imitations began appearing at swap meets. One fellow sold all he had at $10 each, but was smart enough not to buy any more. The following weekend, a competitor was selling them for $5.50, and advertising them under the trade-marked name of the genuine article. A few weeks later, the price had bottomed out at $4.

Also be wary of merchandise which normally has a high markup, but is readily available. This is particularly true of Indian jewelry in the Southwest. Numerous stores and swap meet vendors display signs saying "60% Off" or "Wholesale To The Public." Some actually do sell at a discount, but most simply put a $75 price tag on a particular item, then mark it down to the $30 it was meant to sell for in the first place. The practice is quite common and is perfectly legal (although bordering on false advertising), as a dealer can set whatever arbitrary retail price he wants. But it certainly doesn't help those who don't play the discount game.

Although you will make more money per sale on high ticket items, don't ignore the possibility of carrying some lower priced merchandise as well. A dollar or two-dollar item will appeal to an impulse buyer or child who only has a dollar or two in his pocket. Sales of these items alone will often pay the space rent and make you a profit as well. My wife and I use rabbit skins in our display. Each was selected to either compliment the display as a whole or attract attention to a particular item in our main line. "Are the bunnies for sale?" soon became our most frequently asked question. We soon

got tired of telling people they weren't for sale because they would be too hard to replace. The next time we visited our supplier, we bought a couple of bundles. They sold out the following weekend, and we have been in the bunny business ever since!

A final source for merchandise is your own two hands. Many vendors sell their own handicrafts and do quite well with them. One of the main advantages of selling your own work is that it keeps your actual out-of-pocket costs much lower, thus allowing a higher profit. It also enables you to have a unique item rather than something that every third dealer in the market is selling, or will start to sell if they see your sales are good. Remember, having something different and desirable is one of the keys to success. Last but not least, there are slow times during the day at even the busiest swap meet. If it's possible to work on your handicrafts there, by all means do so. Not only will it help pass the time, but by demonstrating you will attract attention to your display. A friend of mine who makes pottery spends his days at the swap meet painting his work while his wife does the selling.

Selling your own handcrafted items will also let you work the arts & crafts shows, which normally prohibit manufactured items from being sold. These shows can be highly profitable, but it usually costs more to rent space in them than at a swap meet.

Some of the more popular handicrafts to be found at swap meets are pottery, quilting, clocks, wooden toys and leather goods of all types. What you make and sell is limited only by your available time, skill and imagination.

If you aren't particularly skilled with your hands and can't find a good handcrafted item to sell, it's still possible to make a good living selling the more common

swap meet items or merchandise usually found in stores. This is especially true if you find a smaller market where no one else is selling the same thing. You will only need to figure out what you want to sell, where to find it, how much you can afford to spend on stock, and whether you want to sell new or used goods. Some vendors do well with used items, which they can often pick up very cheaply at public auctions or yard sales, so let's look at the used market first.

Some of the more common used items sold by professional dealers at swap meets include:

Small appliances

Tools

Golf Clubs

Clothing & Shoes

China & Glassware (especially collector's items)

Books (paperbacks by name authors sell best)

Antiques (good in some markets, but not all)

Collectibles (all kinds, including comic books, bubble gum cards, war relics, celebrity memorabilia, railroad items and beer cans)

Furniture

Naturally, some used items will sell better than others in a particular market. Golf clubs sell well in the Sun Belt in the winter. Many retirees who head south once the snow flies will buy a set when they reach their destination, then sell them before going home in the spring. Small appliances are good just about anywhere. Most dealers guarantee them, but it would be advantageous to have a selling space near an electrical outlet so you can *show* the customer an appliance works.

The list of new items which can be sold at swap meets is virtually endless, including just about anything that can be found in a retail store. As mentioned earlier, some retailers have stores but also work swap meets.

Of course, it helps to sell something which interests you personally and with which you are familiar. Some people are born salesmen who can sell just about anything, others aren't. If you fall into the latter category, you will find it much easier to sell something you really like as your enthusiasm for the product will be obvious to the customer. It doesn't take a lot of knowledge about sports to sell baseball caps, but an auto mechanic would be more comfortable selling auto accessories than housewares or ladies' underwear. Don't expect to sell posters of John Wayne or Elvis unless you are a fan of theirs. Sooner or later some customer will ask, "How many movies was the Duke killed in?" or "How many gold records did the King have?"

Never intentionally misrepresent your merchandise. Some reputable dealers have unwittingly bought and sold counterfeit Indian Jewelry simply because they weren't knowledgeable enough to know it wasn't the real thing. If they had suspected anything, the "hot pin" test could have saved them a lot of grief. The heated tip of a straight pin will easily penetrate plastic "turquoise," but will have no effect at all on real stones. Unfortunately, some dealers knowingly misrepresent their merchandise. I heard one vendor swear up and down that he was selling genuine, handmade Indian pottery when it was obviously commercial greenware. He also told a customer that his jewelry was sterling silver, when it was actually nickel (or German) silver, a cheap imitation. Believe it or not, many of the worst offenders at this practice are the Indians themselves. This subject will be more thoroughly discussed in the final chapter.

In the Southwest, it is quite common to find vendors selling Navajo-style rugs hand woven by Indians in Mexico. Most of these vendors will tell the customer outright that the rugs are imported, and that's why the price is so low. There is nothing wrong with this, as they are representing their merchandise honestly and in no way trying to delude the customer into thinking they are getting a genuine Navajo rug

Avoid counterfeits of name brand items, bootleg cassette tapes and other shoddy goods of questionable origin. Their price may make them seem attractive, but they are no bargain in the long run. Most swap meets make an honest effort to prevent such goods from being sold, but they do appear from time to time. By selling only first quality merchandise or name brands, you will gain a reputation for honesty and fairness. This will result in repeat sales and customer referrals.

Your choice of new merchandise could include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

Small Appliances (electric razors, vacuums, power tools, stereos, etc.)

Housewares (pots and pans, cutlery, etc.)

Clothing & Shoes

Jewelry (costume, Indian, Black Hills gold, etc.)

House Plants (both real and imitation)

Local & Regional Handicrafts

Auto Accessories (seat covers, tires, mag wheels, etc.)

Sporting Goods (all types, but will vary somewhat according to locality)

Posters, Art Prints, or Oil Paintings

Arts & Crafts Supplies

Furniture

Vacation & Camping Gear

Baby Goods (clothing, strollers, cribs, etc.)

Bumper Stickers

Sunglasses

Seasonal Merchandise (Christmas wrap, cards, and ornaments, Easter baskets, Halloween costumes, etc.)

Notions & Sundries

Pet Supplies

Cameras & Photo Supplies

Pottery (both handcrafted & commercially manufactured)

Clocks & Lamps

Belts & Buckles

Toys (both cheap imports and quality brand items)

Martial Arts Supplies

Biker T-shirts, Wallets, etc.

China & Glassware

Velvet Paintings

Movie Star Photos, Posters, etc.

Cassette Tapes & Records

Books (especially cookbooks and those on subjects with a regional appeal, such as Southwestern Indians, ghost towns and lost mines in Arizona, etc.)

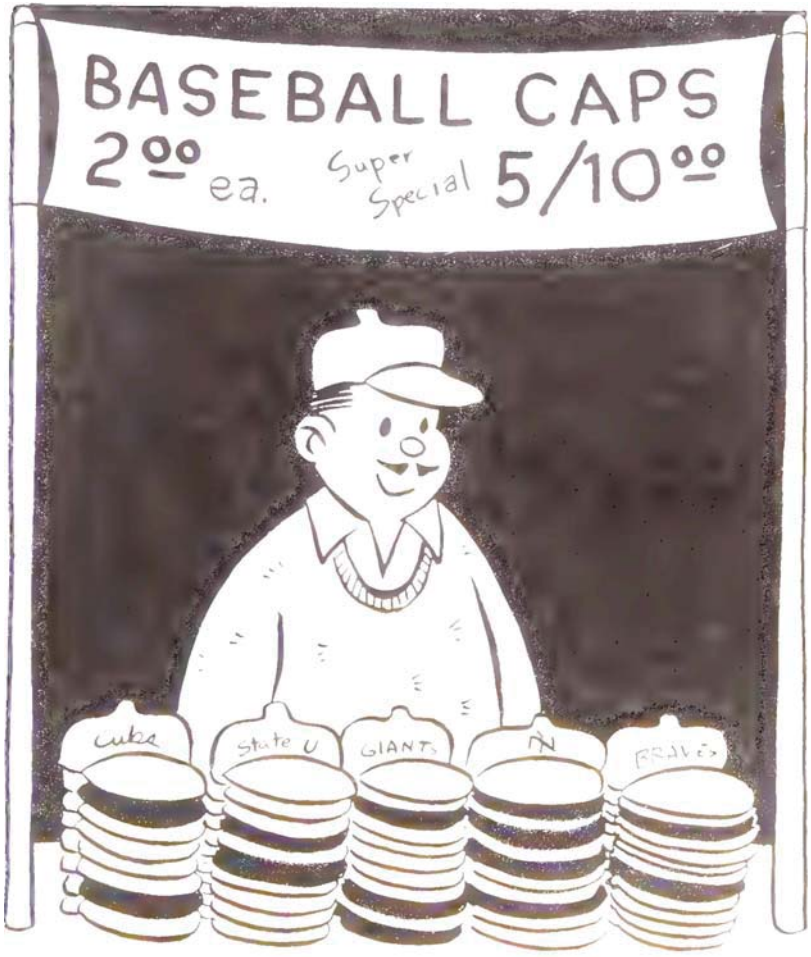
There are literally hundreds of other items and services, which can be sold at swap meets. Some vendors sell real estate, insurance, encyclopedias and memberships in RV resorts. Manufacturers or dealers in RVs, boats, utility trailers and other such items will also

occasionally rent space at a swap meet to display their wares. It's a cheap way to gain exposure to a large number of people. Some of the larger markets even have barbers and beauticians working on the premises.

Ads for wholesalers who specialize in swap meet merchandise will be found in some of the publications listed in the chapter entitled Publications, Organizations and Sources. However, don't ignore the local Yellow Pages nor the wholesale shows mentioned previously. It's best to have a local supplier where you can pick up merchandise in person if possible. If your supplier is located in a distant city, you will have to pay freight or pick up your orders in person. In the latter case, there is travel time and expenses to consider. As mentioned earlier, my wife and I are forced to travel since we hand select our merchandise. This is necessary because the quality we demand is not available locally. On those occasions when the supply can't keep up with the demand, we will buy from local sources. Their quality can't match our usual standards, but is still acceptable. We would prefer to buy locally *all* the time, but it just isn't possible under the circumstances.

A last word of advice on selecting your merchandise: Try to buy enough stock initially so that you look like a serious dealer. The larger your display, the more quickly people will notice it and stop to browse — and buy. Other vendors will also notice you if you attract a crowd. You will know you have a winner if they ask you to wholesale to them!

EFFECTIVE MERCHANDISING



You can have the most unique and desirable product in the world, at a price anyone can afford, but it won't sell if no one knows it exists. Advertising will get the word out fast, and is important enough to warrant a chapter of its own. Our concern here is merchandising,

or at least two aspects of the subject. These are: 1) Creating a recognizable image; 2) Selling to the customer once that image has caught their attention.

If you don't think an image is important, consider the following examples:

A certain well-known actor has appeared in 5 of the top 10 money making movies of all time. He was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor for another film. Yet he can walk down the street and nobody recognizes him. He might look vaguely familiar, but without his hat, leather jacket and whip, Harrison (Indiana Jones) Ford just doesn't stand out in a crowd.

In the 1940's, just about any kid in the civilized world would have recognized Roy Rogers, the King of the Cowboys. When studio executives told Roy they could take any actor they wanted and make him King of the Cowboys just by putting him on Trigger, Roy set out to prove otherwise. One sunny afternoon, he put on an ordinary business suit, picked up a brief case and walked around the corner of Hollywood and Vine. He was confident he would soon be mobbed by autograph hounds. To Roy's chagrin, it was several hours before anyone recognized him. An old high school classmate walked up to Roy, greeted him by his real name, and asked him what he had been doing since they last saw each other. Had Roy been wearing the fancy cowboy outfits that were his trademark, hundreds of people would have recognized him.

Theoretically, Clayton Moore should be the most unrecognizable actor in the world. After all, who knows what he looks like without his mask, white Stetson and silver bullets? In actual fact, many people recognize him just from the sound of his voice. Even if they have never seen a picture of him out of costume, they know that

voice belongs to the man they think of as the "real" Lone Ranger, no matter what actor is currently playing the part.

Large corporations spend millions on their images, with positive results. The golden arches certainly don't make you think of fried chicken. The term "Rocky Mountain spring water" isn't supposed to make you thirsty for a Pepsi. A bell in a circle makes you think of Ma Bell, not a music store.

One of the fastest and easiest ways to create an image for yourself is to have an attractive, eye-catching display. This alone will help set you apart at swap meets. Many vendors tend to go cheap and dirty, either through ignorance or laziness. They just don't realize that a sleazy looking display will only attract customers who are looking for cheap merchandise at giveaway prices. A really nice display will attract those who are more likely to reach for their credit cards rather than change purses.

An attractive display can cost thousands of dollars if it is large and elaborate. However, with a little imagination and work, a small to medium-sized display can be assembled very inexpensively. If you already have some of the necessary items on hand and can borrow others, it can be done with no cash outlay at all. This is a big plus for any entrepreneur who is starting out on a budget.

Our first display consisted of one card table which we owned and several borrowed from neighbors. Since our merchandise displays best against a gold or light brown background, some friends gave us a set of king size gold bed sheets they had never used. We split these down the middle to make table covers. Our sole cash purchase was a gold and white beach umbrella and base for $20. The latter was necessary as we were working in the Sun

Belt in the late spring. The afternoons tended to be very warm.

As our business grew, we returned the borrowed tables and purchased four used ones at a yard sale for $12. A picnic table acquired in the same manner cost another $10. We were unable to match the gold sheets, so we bought three light brown ones which we found on sale at Sears for $6.99 each. The size of our setup was now such that my wife and I had to work at opposite ends, so we invested in two more umbrellas. When I went to the local sand and gravel company to get some sand for the bases, the lady in the office told me to just go help myself. At this point, we had a little over $100 total invested in our display, including our first dozen or so rabbit skins. Yet, we had one of the most attractive displays in the entire swap meet and were being photographed by tourists on an average of once a week. We also noticed that several of the vendors around us were buying new table covers and otherwise sprucing up their acts.

The spaces at the market we were working happened to be the same size as a typical shopping center parking space. We started out with one end space, which allowed us to work out of the trunk of the car. Our tables were set in the aisle, lengthwise along the car. This arrangement soon proved inadequate, so we contracted for three inside spaces, then added a fourth when it became available. We parked our pickup at the rear, running lengthwise across three of the spaces. This allowed us to use the entire 32-foot frontage along with an 11-foot depth, plus 3 feet into the aisle. With this arrangement, we devised a shallow U-shaped floor plan which fit more usable table space into the available area. This gave us a total of 54 feet of display space on tables, plus eight backboards which were anchored to the truck.

The shallow U-shape of our display was also chosen for psychological reasons. Most customers are used to swap meet setups where the tables are just a straight row at the very front of the space. They might not take the trouble to walk into a setup that is a deep U with right angles, or might feel uncomfortable in doing so. A shallow U with a slight angle, on the other hand, is a subtle invitation to enter your display area where they can examine the merchandise more closely. The row of tables in the front is intended to attract the attention of those who still want to keep walking in a straight line (see figure 1).

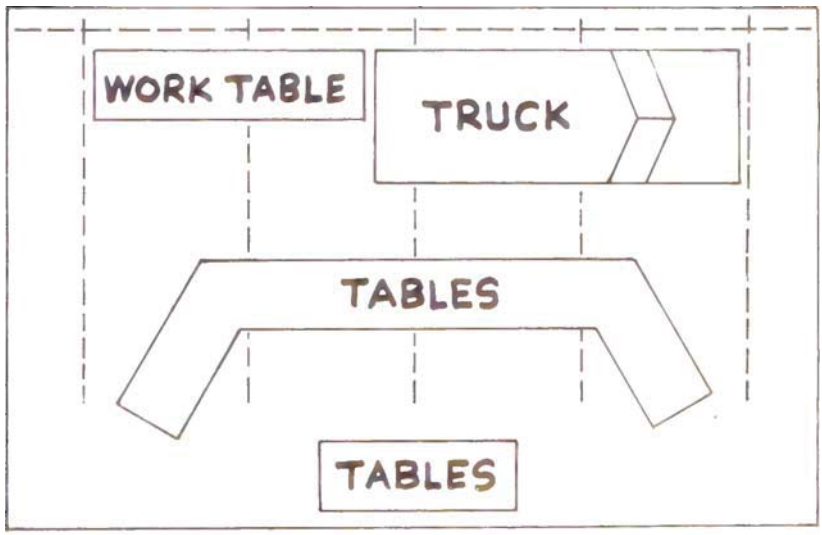


Figure 1

One fellow we know with a large jewelry setup uses a deep U with the base at the front. He is actually working inside a box shape, with the fourth side being his van at the rear. This method seems to work well for him (see figure 2).

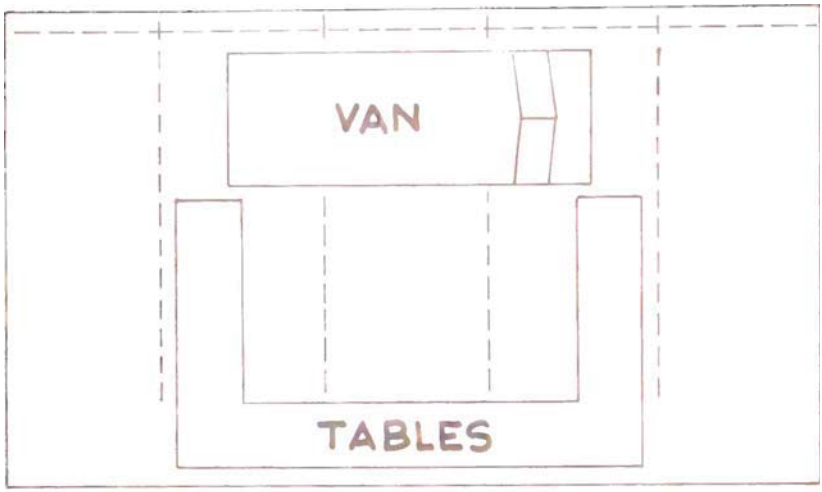


Figure 2

There are numerous other floor plans which can be used for display purposes. Visit the local swap meet, particularly if it is a large one, and take note of some of them. Ask yourself which might be applicable for your type of merchandise, and why. Some are well suited for one type of goods or location, impractical for others. Do some solid thinking before making a final choice. Whatever that choice is, however, keep it flexible. It may be necessary to change your layout when working a different market or adding new items to your inventory.

Some colors attract attention while others tend to blend into the background. This should be kept in mind when selecting table covers. Most merchandise displays best on a plain color, although there are exceptions. One Black Hills gold dealer uses tiger stripe material for his table covers, and the effect is outstanding. Guns should be displayed on a light color background while brass figurines show up best on a dark blue or red cloth. As mentioned earlier, our table covers are gold and light

brown. We also have gold fringe along the front of the tables. This fringe sparkles in the sunlight everytime there is a breeze and attracts attention from quite a distance. Friends of ours who sell black, brown and white Indian pottery use black table covers and silver fringe.

Some vendors work under canopies, others don't. Since our merchandise displays best in direct sunlight, we opted for the umbrellas mentioned earlier. We also made sure our spaces were south-facing in our winter market. This puts the sun in our eyes rather than the customer's. When spaces are oriented toward east or west, we would recommend that you face east if the market is busiest in the morning, west if it is an afternoon market. If you decide to use a canopy, have the end poles extend above the canopy itself. You can then fly flags or pennants from them. Anything moving in the breeze will attract attention. In a large market, these items will also help customers locate you again if they wish to make additional purchases. Many vendors have signs stretched between these poles. The sign can either give the name of your business, or the type of merchandise being sold. If at all possible, the color of the sign should tie in with the rest of the display. A sign for Black Hills gold should have a gold background, not a bright green one. That color would be more appropriate for lawn and garden supplies or house plants.

It will help your image if you have a name for your business. The name should be distinctive, but don't make it too unusual or no one will remember it. Some time ago, Ray Stevens had a hit recording about a squirrel that got loose in a Southern church on Sunday morning. The song was a phenomenal hit in our area. For over a year, the local radio station had a standing rule that they would only play it once an hour. I have heard the song countless times, but can't tell you what

its title was. Everyone simply referred to it as "the squirrel song."

Joe's Auto Parts may not be the catchiest name in the world, but it certainly tells you what Joe is selling, far more than if he picked a title such as Street Machine Boutique. A good compromise would be something like Happy Wheels. The word happy has a positive connotation while most people associate wheels with cars.

Fresh Catch would be a good name for your business if you sell sea food, while Snuff 'N Stuff would be appropriate for tobacco products. Jade Gardens might be a good choice for Oriental imports, Rocking R Ranchwear for Western clothes.

Before spending a lot of money for signs, business cards, letterheads, etc., check to be sure no one else is using the name. When my wife thought of the name for our business, we were almost certain that someone would already be using it, as it was such a catchy name. We checked every telephone directory for our state and discovered the name *wasn't* being used. We then checked with the secretary of state's office. No one had the name registered there, so we registered it. Now no one else can use that name in our home state. Many states will allow you to register a trade name for a small fee, provided the name isn't too similar to one already on file.

If your merchandise is highly unusual or is something that most people are unfamiliar with, a handout sheet or brochure describing it can be very helpful. My wife and I got tired of being hoarse at the end of the day from explaining our merchandise to tourists, so I wrote a brochure giving its history, how to care for it, etc. This brochure has been a valuable selling aid and has helped increase sales far beyond its printing cost. Some people take the brochure home to read, then come back the

next day or the next week to buy. A few have even asked for specific items mentioned in the brochure. Whenever someone buys several items for gifts, we offer them a brochure for each piece so the recipient will appreciate the gift more. This practice has had very beneficial results. One lady bought 19 pieces from us one day, then came back the next day for a dozen more.

It goes without saying that you should be as knowledgeable as possible about your merchandise. If you don't know anything about it when you first start, learn all you can as quickly as you can. It isn't necessary to be a world-class authority on the subject, but customers can spot an ignorant sales clerk very quickly. You wouldn't want to buy martial arts supplies from someone who doesn't know that a karate school is called a *dojo* and a throwing star is a *shuriken*. Neither would the next guy

Even if you are an expert on your merchandise, sooner or later you will have a customer who knows even more. If you can't answer a particular question for them, admit it. They will respect your honesty and also feel complimented that you recognize their superior knowledge. Above all, don't fake it when talking to these people. I know one guy who considers himself an expert on every subject known to mankind, plus a few the world hasn't thought of yet. He read a book once, so that makes him an expert on publishing. He once went for a ride in an airplane, so he is an authority on aviation. Unfortunately, about the only thing he is really an expert at is revealing his ignorance the minute he opens his mouth. His ego is so big that he won't back off when contradicted by a real expert. He simply tells them they don't know what they are talking about.

If you sell clothing or jewelry, by all means wear your merchandise. Don't wear cammies if you sell Western

clothes, and vice versa. If you sell *any* type of American Indian goods, wear Indian jewelry, even if it's just a bolo tie or a belt buckle. If you sell cowboy hats, wear one, even when working under a canopy. In short, be a walking billboard for your inventory. The only vendor I ever saw wearing a suit was selling neckties.

Merchandise which can be demonstrated, should be. One fellow who sells telephones has a unique but highly effective method of selling his wares. If a customer is interested in a particular phone, he will plug it in, then dial a preset number on his master phone. When the phone rings, the customer picks up the receiver on the unit that interests them and talks to the vendor on it, just as if they were talking to someone several miles away. This method involves more work than simply setting the telephone on top of its box, but it gets results.

A technique which has worked extremely well for us is to display an inferior piece of merchandise next to ours. The first day we set up at what was to become our permanent winter market, we had 14 pieces in our main line. By noon we had sold only one. As things were slow, my wife decided to walk the market just to see what other vendors were selling. (We still do this whenever time permits, just as we still look for new lines to carry.) Upon returning, she informed me that another vendor was selling the same thing we were, but of vastly inferior quality. I went right down to his stall and bought one of his pieces, which we placed on the table next to ours. When a customer stopped to browse, we would show them our "lost cause" sample and point out the differences between it and our merchandise. We sold 16 pieces in the next hour.

At no point did we actually knock our competitor, or even acknowledge that our sample had been purchased nearby. Instead, we took a more positive approach

which went something like this: "These are such-and-such. Are you familiar with them? No? Well, here's what you normally see." We would then pick up the sample, which was fairly typical of the quality normally found, and point out the differences in workmanship, finish, etc. Most people could readily see the difference and would buy immediately. We no longer use this sales technique, since we now have a reputation for selling only the best quality, but it worked well when it was needed.

One problem with selling handcrafted goods is that some people tend to think in terms of size and price only. They know that a Mercedes and a Toyota are both small cars and one costs far more than the other. Yet they can't understand that this can be true of handicrafts as well. They will point to one of our finest pieces and ask, "How much is this size?" We then have to explain that the price is determined by the fame of the artisan and the amount of work involved, plus the uniqueness of the individual piece, not the size. Yes, we have larger pieces that are less than half the price, but look at the difference in workmanship. Some can see it, some can't.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we had examples of both types visit our setup. The first lady took a good look at our merchandise, then commented, "I bought some this size from the guy down the aisle yesterday. They were a lot cheaper than these."

"Fine," my wife replied. "His stuff is worth the price."

Less than half an hour later, another lady came by and said, "There's a guy down the way selling these, but they aren't nearly as nice as yours."

One might think that high ticket items don't sell at swap meets. Actually, they can sell consistently in the right market. Some months ago, we bought a particu-

fairly nice piece which we hoped we would never sell as we wanted to keep it for ourselves. We put a $500 price tag on it, thinking that would discourage anyone from buying it. Less than four hours after we put it on display, a gentleman pulled the cash out of his pocket and walked off with our treasured piece. The artisan who made it is tops in the field and his work is instantly recognizable. During the busy winter season, we take almost his entire output. We have sold as many as 6 of his pieces in a single weekend, with as many as 3 to one buyer at a time. Of course, very few of them are in the $500 price range, but his work is still the most expensive we carry.

Whether they use signs, price tags, or stickers, most vendors do have their prices posted. This saves time answering customer's questions about prices, an important factor on a busy day. When you are trying to wait on 3 or 4 customers at once, the last thing you need is someone interrupting you to ask a price. Often these people aren't seriously interested anyway, but just want to know the price of something out of curiosity.

Posted prices are also a good defense against the bargain hunter who thinks all swap meet prices are negotiable. If he holds up an item and asks what you will take for it, you can simply reply that you will take whatever price is marked. We have had several people refuse to buy simply because we wanted the full price for our merchandise. More often than not, they would return in a few minutes, willing to pay that price. We always laugh to ourselves if the item they wanted has been sold in the meantime.

You will soon learn which customers are serious and which are merely casual browsers just by the way they act. Of course, there will always be the exception. Someone who seems only mildly interested may ask the

price on a certain high ticket item. When the price is quoted, he will instantly reach for his wallet. Others may browse for several weeks before buying. Many winter visitors in the Sun Belt stay in motor homes or travel trailers and don't want a lot of extra stuff around. They will look for the last few weekends, then buy just before going home. Shopping at the last minute can be a problem if they are looking for a one-of-a-kind item. Just because they saw it in January, they expect to be able to buy it at the end of March.

Dealers who sell mass-produced goods such as T-shirts and baseball caps usually have a good selection at all times. In a really good market, however, a vendor with handicrafts or original works of art may run low on stock very quickly. More than once we have had someone complain about our poor selection on a Sunday afternoon. We simply tell them to see us early the following Thursday or Friday morning when we have re-stocked. In one case, a vendor couldn't set up one weekend because he had literally sold everything he had to one customer on Friday morning. He went home that afternoon with nearly $2,000 in his pocket.

Some people are very gregarious and have never met a stranger. Others are shy and have trouble approaching anyone they don't know. If you fall into the latter category, it's still possible to be successful at selling as there are several ways of breaking the ice with a customer.

When someone enters your stall, acknowledge their presence by smiling at them. A simple "Good morning!" or "Hello" is usually all that is necessary. Tell the customer they are welcome to browse and you will be happy to answer any questions for them. Offer to be helpful, but don't hover over them like a vulture. This is especially true if you are a man waiting on a woman.

Most women feel more comfortable if another woman waits on them. My wife is far more successful selling to women than I am, even though I know just as much about the merchandise as she does. I have no trouble at all waiting on the good ol' boy in cammies and a SWAT team cap.

Sometimes it's possible to discover a mutual interest with a customer even before talking to them. Many men wear lodge rings, belt buckles or bolo ties. If you happen to be a member of the same organization, that's enough to break the ice. It doesn't take a psychic to tell that a guy wearing a T-shirt boasting "Once a Marine, Always a Marine" should be interested in military subjects. Anybody wearing an NRA Life Member belt buckle will obviously be interested in guns. It's usually a little more difficult to tell what a woman's interests are, but you can always compliment her on her jade necklace or fancy white parasol.

These methods of breaking the ice generally work well with customers, and can even make you some lifelong friends. While setting up one morning in our winter location, I noticed the vendor across the aisle was wearing a *USS Yorktown* cap. As soon as we were set up, I went over and asked him when he served on that ship. We got to talking and soon discovered we had several mutual interests. Fortunately, our wives had enough in common that they also became fast friends. Within just a few weeks, we were going out to breakfast together on mornings when we were rained out. Although we have known these people only a few months, it seems like years.

THE RIGHT MARKET

If there is one single factor which is even more important than your selection of merchandise, it's finding the right market. Certain types of merchandise will sell quite well in one market, yet will do poorly in another just a few miles away. The winning combination is kind

of like the chicken or the egg. Which came first? Your choice of a market may depend on your choice of merchandise, or you may choose a market, then pick your inventory accordingly.

Of course, finding a good market is much easier if you live in a large metropolitan area where there are several swap meets. Simply visit each one and observe the number and general type of customers, kinds of merchandise being sold, etc. Talk to the management and vendors alike. They can fill you in on details which may not be readily apparent. All of these facts will help you decide which market is best for you, whether it be the one just down the street or another on the opposite end of town. Don't let space rent and the cost of gas alone be the deciding factors. A market which is 50 miles away may well be the best choice for the simple reason that is where you will make the most sales. The bottom line is the money that goes in your pocket, not initial costs.

Virtually every vendor dreams of finding that ideal market where the weather is always perfect and customers with ready cash flock to their stall. That market simply doesn't exist, although some come a lot closer to the ideal than others. The typical selling for a vendor in this ideal market might go something like this:

Joe awakens at 8:30 on a bright, sunny Saturday morning. He quickly shaves, showers, and dresses, then hops in his Mercedes and drives the three blocks to the Pot O' Gold Swap Meet. He parks in his reserved space, which is located only a few yards from the main customer entrance. After a leisurely breakfast at the Vendor's Club, compliments of the management, he returns to his space to set up. Since he sells a very small, high ticket item which is in constant demand, Joe needs only a card table on which to display his wares. His en-

tire stock is carried in one small suitcase. Total setup time is 5 minutes, so Joe is in business by 10 o'clock. As he waits a minute or two for the first buyer of the day, he reflects that it has now been 3 years, 7 months and 11 days since it rained during swap meet hours. The buyers are soon lined up with the cash in their hands, and by 11:30 Joe is sold out. He packs his card table and empty suitcase in the trunk of the car, then heads back to the Vendor's Club for a leisurely all-you-can-eat buffet of steak and lobster. Again, it's compliments of the management. After that, Joe goes home to count his day's receipts (over $3,000), then dons his swim trunks to spend the rest of the weekend lounging around the pool. He is now faced with the toughest part of the whole weekend. About a dozen gorgeous airline stewardesses have recently moved into the apartment complex where Joe lives and he has to decide which one he wants to take out to dinner that night.

That would indeed be the ideal life, but it's about as believable as a politician the week before election. Some markets do start late in the morning and enjoy fair weather most of the time. A few have complimentary coffee and donuts for vendors, but they are rare. Several vendors with whom I am acquainted have had $3,000 days, but not many. All had a great deal more invested in their inventory and didn't even come close to selling out. A successful selling day in the life of a real vendor would read more like the following paragraph.

Bob and his wife arise around 4:30 a.m. She packs their lunch while he showers and dresses, then she gets ready while he packs everything they will need for the day in the pickup. As they drive the 30 miles to their market, they breakfast on bananas and bologna and cheese sandwiches. It's 6 o'clock and still dark when they pull into their spaces. Although it normally takes them over an hour to set up and customers will start

arriving at 7:30, they remain inside the truck. Outside temperature is 40° and the sky looks threatening. Finally, at 6:30, Bob gets out to talk to a neighboring vendor. The other fellow agrees the weather might clear, but it might not. He says he plans to wait at least another hour before doing anything. His space rent is paid and not refundable, so he might as well take a chance. The clouds finally begin breaking up around 8:30, so Bob and the others vendors start setting up. Already customers are stopping and asking, "Aren't you set up yet?" There are numerous interruptions for sales as Bob and his wife attempt to put merchandise on display. They munch another sandwich one bite at a time and marvel that it's only serious buyers out today, not the casual lookers. About 11:30 they still aren't completely set up, and the weather is starting to turn foul again. Bob decides they should tear down — fast. A few minutes after they pull out of the swap meet gate, the rain comes down in torrents. The storm is the main topic of the 6 o'clock news that night.

The day described above actually happened, as several vendors other than myself can readily attest. My wife and I agree it was the weirdest selling day we have ever experienced. We only had about an hour of selling time, but were extremely busy during that hour. People were literally snatching up merchandise as fast as we unpacked and waving their money in our faces. Other vendors had the same experience. The customers were obviously also watching the weather, as many were carrying raincoats and/or umbrellas. They wanted to buy *right now* so they could get home before they got wet. If only they would buy like that all day long on bright sunny days!

Although neither of the examples listed above is a typical day at a swap meet, you will find there is nothing typical of every market, even though there are similar-

ities. Swap meets will vary in size from a dozen or so vendors in the parking lot of the local bar on Sunday afternoon to large, permanent installations costing millions of dollars. Some of the latter accommodate hundreds of vendors and are open 7 days a week. They may offer all sorts of amenities for vendors and shoppers alike. One even has a beer garden with a giant screen TV in the lounge. At some markets, you set up and the manager comes around and collects the space rent. Others offer the option of contracting for the same space each day, a privilege for which you will pay from one week to one month in advance.

Generally speaking, sales will be better in the larger markets, but not always. Most of the prime spaces will already be occupied by contract vendors. There may even be a waiting list if these spaces ever become available. A new vendor is likely to get stuck in whatever space is left. This may be on the back row which is often far from the snack bar and rest rooms — even farther from the foot traffic that is so essential to good sales.

The wide variation in size, amenities and management of swap meets can best be shown by describing markets I have actually worked. The five examples that follow include the largest and smallest, best and worst. Both negative and positive comments on each follow the descriptions. All are located west of the Mississippi.

Market A

Located in the parking lot of the local bar, this tiny market served a small farming community and the surrounding area. You could literally hear coyotes howling while setting up on Sunday morning. Space rent was $2 or $5 if you reserved a certain spot. Spaces weren't

marked, but vendors paid for one space for a car or small pickup. They were charged for two spaces if they had a large pickup or van, motor home, or converted school bus. The manager came around and collected after vendors were set up. He played his cantankerous old fogey image to the hilt, but was actually sympathetic toward vendors. If they got rained out before noon, he would tell them they could set up for free on the following Sunday. There were only a dozen or so vendors, but all were professionals with the exception of my wife and myself. However, the others thought we were pros because my wife had made an effort to display our surplus household goods attractively (refer back to the chapter on merchandising). We did very well at this market because it had quite a bit of foot traffic for its size. More importantly, the people who came had money in their pockets and were willing to spend it. Some even came from nearby RV resorts. Too bad this little market no longer exists, as it was lucrative out of all proportion to its size. *Negative:* Held on dirt, no amenities, lack of customer parking, you never knew when a stray cow might come wandering through. *Positive:* Excellent foot traffic, customers willing to spend money, extremely high percentage of professional vendors, basically cooperative management

Market B

This is a small market held in a drive-in theater on Saturday and Sunday. Space rent is $6 for

a 20 foot width. Depth is variable, but is whatever you need within reason. It's a summer market only as it is located in a mountain resort area. Most vendors are professionals, although there are always a handful of locals cleaning out the garage. Snack bar and rest rooms on premises which are typical of those found in any small town drive-in. There are no contracts available, but if you are a regular just let the owner know you are coming in and he will hold your favorite spaces for you. On a rainy day, you can go ahead and pull into your spaces until you see what the weather is going to do. You won't be charged space rent unless you actually set up. Although not the most lucrative market in the world, it's the best one we've found for the summer months within a reasonable distance of our home base. A number of vendors who work our winter market spend their summers here as they know they can at least make grocery money. *Negative:* Held on dirt, not advertised, subject to the possibility of thunderstorms just about every weekend. For this reason, it is a very early market, with most vendors starting to tear down shortly after lunch. *Positive:* Decent foot traffic for its size, large percentage of professional vendors, cooperative management, fairly good sales. The area has a relaxed lifestyle and friendly people. The owners of the motel where we stay even loan us their VCR and movies at no charge. A very pleasant area in which to spend the summer and at least have a chance to make living expenses.

Market C

This is a medium-sized market which *should* be good due to its proximity to the state capitol. It is often touted as the best market in its state. If it is, I would hate to see the worst. This market is bad, bad, bad. The owner's only concern is collecting today's space rent. He's a likeable enough guy, but can't see that the key to improving the market is attracting more professional vendors. None of the few he has are happy. Only a few spaces are available on contract, and there will be even fewer next season. Contracts begin in March. The owner refuses to contract spaces any later in the year, even though the only good selling months are July and August. One contract vendor set up and paid space rent for two months before taking in a dime. Another vendor wanted to sign a contract in June and even offered to pay the entire season's space rent in advance. The owner turned him down flat. He has threatened to raise the space rent because of what he calls a trash problem. The main problem with the trash is that he is too cheap to have it picked up on Saturday night, so the place looks like Omaha Beach the day after D-Day on Sunday morning. Also, the high percentage of vendors who are cleaning out the garage means they will simply leave their trash and unsold, unwanted items behind when they leave. Despite a large number of millionaires in the area, there are very few buyers with money walking through this swap meet. Most customers are looking for a bargain on used merchandise or

just looking, period. The "clean rest rooms" advertised are actually shabby outhouses. We worked this market six weekends and never even made travel expenses. Space rent is $7. For another $2, vendors can set up their tables the night before and even park an RV at the back of the space. There are no hookups available. In all fairness to this market, I have heard the other swap meet in the area is equally poor for sales. A third opened, floundered and folded when we were in the area. Maybe *no* swap meet would succeed there, no matter how professionally it was managed. The owner of Market C claims he advertises, but I know we spent more for gas to travel to this market on one weekend than he spends on advertising in a month. He runs one small ad in just one little local freebie newspaper twice a month. The ad is very generic and hardly calculated to attract a crowd. *Negative:* Held on dirt, mismanaged rather than managed, lack of professional vendors, very poor sales. My negative feelings carry over to the entire area, which strikes me as one massive Three Stooges act. Although we stayed at the same motel (a large national chain) every weekend, they could never get our reservations right. Either they lost them entirely, had an extra day in them, or shorted us a day. Ordering one from Column A and two from Column B at the local Chinese restaurant might bring us anything from taco salad and chicken soup to candied apples and barbecued tuna. A grocery clerk gave us directions to the local ice plant, which should have been easy to find as it was only a couple of miles away. It

took 45 minutes and directions from three more people who worked in the area. These aren't isolated incidents, but typical of what we encountered every day. Many people joke about the incompetence of bureaucrats. In this city, they may well be the only ones who know what they're doing. I should have been leery when I was told the only sports program at the local high school was Special Olympics. *Positive:* The way it's going, this market can't last much longer. We met some very nice vendors there, who will then be forced to find other markets which should prove more lucrative for them

Market D

Located on the very edge of a large metropolitan area in the Sun Belt, this is our winter market and probably will be for many years to come. It is a large market, with 1500 vendor spaces occupied at the height of the winter season. Good management and a friendly, helpful office staff are a hallmark of this swap meet. So are the exceptionally clean rest rooms which have full-time attendants. Space rent is $6.50 for an inside space, $8.50 for an end space, measuring 9 x 19 feet. The contract season begins November 1st and runs until spring. A new vendor can contract for unclaimed spaces at any time during the season. Vendors can also change their contract spaces to any that are available at any time during the season. Several excellent snack bars serve fast food, which is better than that served by some

national franchises. The market is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from the first weekend in October until the end of May. June through September it is open Monday, Thursday and Friday nights. It used to be held in the parking lot of the local dog track. A few years ago, a new facility was constructed specifically for the swap meet right next door. Many old-time vendors say business was much better before the move. One told me he was losing money if he wasn't in that market by October 1st. He even had a year when he was still doing well there in July, but finally called it quits for the season because of the heat. Now the season runs from about the middle of November until the end of April. There are a number of factors which have created a shorter season, none of them within the management's control. Whatever this market might have been at one time, I have no quarrel with it today. Vendors who complain about how good it used to be still come back every winter rather than going elsewhere. This swap meet isn't well advertised, except during the Christmas season when it is open daily. There is no reason to advertise when there are weekends they have to turn shoppers away because the parking lot is full! On the other hand, they have an excellent advertising program for vendors. The management publishes a shopper's guide, complete with map of the swap meet, which is handed to customers as they come in the gate. Vendors can purchase ad space in it for a very nominal fee, considering the potential for increasing sales. They can also run announcements on the PA system which is heard throughout the

market. The cost is $2 daily if read on the hour, $4 if every half hour. A Cape Canaveral-style countdown on Sundays tells vendors and customers alike that it's only seconds until noon. State law prohibits the sale of alcoholic beverages before that hour, so the announcer will say, "Five, four, three, two, one... it's now beer time." *Negative:* Not as good a market as it once was, but still one of the best for the right merchandise. Spaces are slightly smaller than normal. They didn't fudge much, but enough so they could work quite a few more into a given area. *Positive:* Paved, with spaces clearly marked. Efficient, cooperative management. Clean rest rooms and excellent trash pickup every afternoon. The place is spotless in the morning. Contract vendors need only pay for their spaces one week in advance and can miss three weeks in a row before their contracts are cancelled. In-house advertising program for vendors is a bargain. We have had numerous people come to our setup with the shopper's guide opened to our ad. Excellent foot traffic, many tourists and winter visitors with money in their pockets. A very high percentage of professional vendors, many of whom are making an excellent living. At least two bring their merchandise in 18-wheelers.

Market E

This very large market is located in the parking lot of a famous sports coliseum (no, it isn't the Rose Bowl or Astrodome). It is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Space rent varies

slightly according to the day, but averages $15. Spaces measure 16 by 19 feet on all the rows except the back one. There they measure 16 by 16 feet, but cost the same. All spaces are paved and clearly marked. This is a popular market with vendors, so it's usually necessary to buy tickets in advance for *any* space, including the back row. The problem with this is there is a $5 per space per day extra charge. As some vendors move on to other markets, their spaces are awarded to new vendors by a unique method. A lottery is held to determine their place in line for the vacated spaces, as there is always a waiting list. The first vendor who is drawn gets first place in line, the second is right behind him, etc. When a vendor selects new spaces from those available, he must pay a full month's space rent in advance, *plus* the $5 extra charge. I feel the latter is totally unjustified. After all, the promoter is getting the use of the vendor's money a month in advance, so why should he charge them an extra fee besides? In all fairness to him, his lease for the market is extremely expensive, but it would appear from the number of vendors that this extra fee alone would pay the lease. The promoter also claims he doesn't carry any liability insurance, that it's the responsibility of the individual vendors. Again, I feel this is a crock as I doubt if the owners would give him a lease if he didn't have insurance. Someone injured on their property could sue them as the owners, even if they weren't responsible for the condition or negligence contributing to or causing

the injury. The plaintiff might not win, but could still cost the owners a lot in legal fees. On the plus side, the promoter spends a good deal on media advertising and provides highly visible uniformed and armed security. The security people project neither a Barney Fife nor a storm trooper image, but look to be highly competent. You feel better knowing they are there. One vendor told us this market is excellent from October until the middle of January, but that you can make a living there all year long. Clean rest rooms, numerous snack bars and a very high percentage of professional vendors rounds out our review of this particular swap meet. *Negative:* A new vendor will undoubtedly get stuck on the back row where spaces are smaller and foot traffic is nil. Based on these considerations, space rent should be about one-fourth what it is for other spaces, yet it's the same. The $5 extra charge for buying spaces in advance also seems unjustified. *Positive:* On pavement, professionally managed, excellent security, extensive advertising. This market even provides shuttle rides from outlying areas. We did very poorly, but can't adequately judge the market based on one weekend. We overheard one vendor say, "I used to set up at (name of a supposedly good market). I decided to try this one, and made more money in one day here than in a whole month there." We may try this swap meet again, as we feel that in the long run it could be a very lucrative one. Motels in the area are quite expensive, but there are many

fine restaurants nearby that have reasonable prices. In fact, we were amazed at just how inexpensive one really good Mexican restaurant was. It had not only a very unique atmosphere, but an amazing variety of selections as well.

As can be seen from the above examples, even some of the best swap meets can be seasonal. Those held indoors are affected by outside temperature to a lesser degree, but their business is still dependent on the number of people in the area at any given time of the year. If the markets in your area are busy in the winter but look like ghost towns in the summer, it may be necessary to leave the area for a good summer market.

There are several guides published which list thousands of swap meets all over the country. These are invaluable, but none is complete. There are literally hundreds of smaller markets which aren't listed. The publishers can hardly be faulted, as they can't list a market they don't know exists. Despite the millionaire playboy image so carefully cultivated by Hugh Hefner, most publishers are overworked and underpaid. They simply don't have the time or money to run all over the country looking for unlisted markets. It's up to the swap meet promoters to send in their information and update it from time to time. Again, we're back to the chicken or the egg, as a lot of people who run small markets don't know these guides exist. The ones with which I am familiar are listed in the next to last chapter, Publications, Organizations and Sources.

Virtually every guide lists swap meets alphabetically by state and city. Clark's guide probably lists the largest number of swap meets while the one from Ballantine lists the fewest. However, the latter has the most com-

plete information on the markets it does show. This particular guide is aimed mainly at antique and collectibles dealers, so lists only those swap meets which are good for that type of merchandise. The information contained therein is especially valuable to a vendor who knows how to read between the lines and discover what isn't said. Using the basic Ballantine style, let's look at a couple of hypothetical listings. The first may read something like this:

COBB'S CORNER

Big Frankie's Flea Market. In parking lot of Longhorn Saloon, intersection of State Routes 83 and 117, 45 miles north of Huntsville. Saturday & Sunday, 7 A.M. til ? Approx. 20 dealers. $5 for roadside location, all other spaces $2. Contact Big Frankie Fedora at (123) 456-7890 for more information.

Based on the above facts alone, this would appear to be a rather poor market. The small number of dealers and low space rent aren't encouraging. However, a map of the area shows that State Routes 83 and 117 are right in the heart of a major resort area, with two or three for-members-only (at $10,000 per) RV parks nearby. The number of dealers is undoubtedly limited by the size of the parking lot, not attributable to poor sales. Maybe the space rent is low because Big Frankie is just trying to make a few bucks on the side, not make a living off the flea market itself. Big Frankie's looks a lot better when these facts are considered. Even more encouraging is the statement of a vendor at another swap meet during the winter season: "I was passing through Cobb's Corner last June and decided to set up at Big Frankie's

to make some grocery money. I took in over $400 my first day, so I stayed until Labor Day."

Vendors, themselves, are often the best sources of information regarding good and bad markets. But be leery of other's success stories. The fact that a certain market was good for them doesn't necessarily mean it will be good for you. Also, some people will give you the straight scoop while others tend to exaggerate. At least half a dozen otherwise knowledgeable vendors told us that Market C should be fantastic for us. We should have cut our losses and run after a couple of weekends, but everyone kept telling us sales would be better "next week." Now we know better. We should have listened to a couple of people who were skeptical. When doing homework on potential markets, double check *everything*. If 2 + 2 equals 5, it should probably only be 3½.

Now let's take a look at our second hypothetical listing and see what it does or doesn't say:

CAPITAL CITY

Cooper Valley Swap Meet. 2345 Harmony Hills Blvd. (Take Harmony Hills exit off Interstate 12.) Open Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 7 A.M. until dark. Approx. 1500 dealers outdoors, 300 indoors. Outdoor spaces are $12 on Thursday, $15 on Friday, $20 on Saturday and Sunday. Reservations are recommended. Indoor spaces (10' x 10') are $200 per month on an annual contract. There is a waiting list for these. Daily vendors (those without a contract or reservations) line up as early as 3 A.M. to purchase the few outside spaces available. Seven food concessions plus vendor's lounge. Clean rest rooms, uniformed

security, 50¢ admission charge, $2 for parking. Average weekend attendance, 25-35,000. For further information call Carol Bailey or Doug Ch[illegible]

This is obviously a good-sized market, and probably a lucrative one for most types of merchandise. The waiting list for indoor spaces and the fact that daily vendors line up at 3 A.M. indicate that sales should be good. Many of the larger, more affluent markets charge admission and parking fees. Space rent for Saturdays and Sundays is higher because they are the busiest days. The main drawback to this market could be its size. Many elderly shoppers will become tired before they have covered it all. A vendor could work this market for months before some regular customers discovered his location. However, if he has the financial resources to carry him through until he builds up a following, he could do extremely well in the long run. Repeat customers and referrals can account for a significant p[illegible]

Even in a large market where most of the vendors are under contract, it's sometimes possible to get good spaces without having to wait for months. During our first contract season in Market D, we were located on a fairly busy row near one of the most popular food concessions. There were other spaces available on busier rows, but we were limited in our choice by our desire to face south. As mentioned in the chapter on merchandising, some items show up best in direct sunlight. This may be a deciding factor in your choice of location. If not, then you should have a wider range of spaces from which to choose. At most swap meets, the best locations go

- on a corner or at the end of a row with cross aisles
- near the main customer entrance
- near a food concession
- or directly across the aisle from the entrance to the women's rest room.

If you take credit cards, you will also want to be near a telephone. It's embarrassing to have a customer wait for what seems like hours while you walk a quarter mile to the nearest phone, call and verify their card is good for a $600 purchase, then walk back to your stall. Some vendors with high ticket merchandise have cellular phones so they can call in credit card sales right from their stalls.

Before setting up at a large market for the first time, it's best to visit it. Find out from the management what the rules are, what time most professional vendors arrive, whether most customers come in the morning or afternoon, etc. Each market is different, and can vary from day to day. You don't want to arrive at 9:30 and try to put your oversized van at the rear of a couple of inside spaces if everyone else is already set up. Unless all spaces are sold on a first-come, first-served basis, you also don't want to be completely set up at dawn if there is normally only a handful of customers before 10:30.

If a market is open Monday on a holiday weekend, ask other vendors *and* the management if it is any good. We didn't set up last New Year's Day, even though the swap meet was open. The following day we learned that only a handful of vendors had worked it, but they all did very well. Attendance wasn't great, but the people who did turn out were serious buyers. When we learned that Market B would be open on Labor Day, we asked the owner if it would be a busy day. "It's not that good," he replied. "I'm only going to be open because some of my

dealers want to set up." We certainly appreciated his honesty. By contrast, the owner of Market C would tell you that every day he's open is a good selling day. I would hate to hear any of his fishing tales!

In between the extremes of Big Frankie's Flea Market and the Cooper Valley Swap Meet, you will find markets of every description. Some are held only once or twice a year or the third Sunday of the month. There is also a great variation in the size of spaces. Some will be the size of an ordinary parking space while others may be as large as 20 feet square. You might need 4 or 5 spaces in one location, only a couple in another. At one swap meet, the person selling spaces may tell you, "Pull in next to that oak tree," or "Your space is the third one down on the row with the blue poles." The fellow assigning you a space at the next swap meet may very well hand you a ticket with the space number, day of the week and date imprinted on it. Many smaller swap meets are held on dirt and have no markings at all to indicate spaces. Most larger ones are held on pavement, with the spaces clearly delineated and numbered. All other factors being equal, a paved market is superior every time simply because the merchandise will stay cleaner.

Some swap meets have electricity available at vendors' spaces. This is a big plus if you sell small appliances, TVs or stereos. These items will sell better if you can demonstrate them. If electricity isn't available, there are a couple of other solutions. More than one vendor has devised a way to run an ordinary stereo off a 12-volt car battery. Some who can afford it invest in a nice, *quiet* generator. Twice we have been set up next to vendors who were considerate enough to say, "If the noise bothers you, let me know and I'll turn the generator off." Fortunately, they were so quiet we didn't even notice them after the first few minutes.

One of the few common denominators of just about every swap meet is that there will be slow periods during the day. This is true of even the busiest markets. Most vendors agree there are several ways of attracting customers to your stall when this happens:

1) Try to get a bite to eat while you have the chance.
2) Ask a neighboring vendor to watch your stall while you go the rest room (this works best if he or she knows virtually nothing about your merchandise).
3) Decide to walk the market and see who is selling what.
4) Go to the swap meet office to get change, pick up next week's tickets or discuss your contract for the following season.
5) Discover the vendor next to you shares a mutual interest and start a conversation with him or her. This method is especially effective if the subject is a hobby you can both talk about for hours on end.
6) Decide to take inventory and see what you need to order next week.
7) Start reading the last chapter in a good book you were too tired to finish last night.
8) Decide to tear down early, especially if the weather looks threatening.

The latter method seems to be especially effective, and can even have customers running up to you as you put the last box of merchandise in the back of the pickup. Consider the following statements, actually made to us by other vendors:

1) "I swear I'm going to start tearing down at 8:30 every morning and pack real slowly all day long. I'm never busy until I start packing up."

2) "I had a heck of a good day yesterday. I had only done $16 by 1:30, so I decided to knock off early and go home. Ten minutes after I started packing, a guy came up and bought $700 worth of kachinas."

3) "I had all my tools packed up and put away when a guy came up and wanted to look at them. I told him I had been there since 5:30 that morning and wanted to go home. It would cost him a $50 bill for me to unpack again. He pulled one out of his billfold and handed it to me, so I unpacked again and told him to pick out $50 worth of tools."

My wife and I have had several days when we took in more money while tearing down than we had while completely set up. In one case, it took us over an hour longer than normal to tear down simply because we were interrupted for numerous small sales which totaled over $300. The sun was setting as we pulled out of the swap meet. In another, we only made a couple of sales, but they totaled $160. On that particular day the customers asked for a specific item they had seen earlier and we were able to find the right box with little trouble, so we were only delayed a few minutes.

In a couple of cases, we have even made some pretty nice sales after we got home. One lady had purchased from us the day before and had taken one of our business cards. She called us around supper time Sunday night and said she wanted some more pieces, but wouldn't be in the area the following weekend. We told her to come on over and we would get some merchandise out of the truck while we were waiting for her. She spent over $90 with us that evening, then called the next morning and wanted to buy more. Customers like her should happen every day!

Sometimes you can research a market thoroughly, do your homework properly, decide that it looks good and then set up there and discover that it's bad. This could be merely a temporary situation. No market can be properly judged by the first weekend's sales. However, if sales are poor several weekends in a row, chances are the market really *is* bad, at least at that time of the year or for your type of merchandise. Don't despair. What may seem like a major disaster at the time could prove beneficial in the long run. Another vendor might tell you of a different market which is very lucrative. On the other hand, you could tell him of one, or give him some helpful hints for improving his display.

After reading the vendor's guidebooks, talking to the vendors themselves and some personal investigation, it should be possible for you to determine the best market which is nearest your home. There may be a better market several hundred miles away, but you want to keep travel expenses to a minimum as they can quickly offset any profit you might make. We learned this the hard way by going to Market C. Sales proved to be better at Market B, and our travel expenses were far less.

No matter what the facts may indicate, you can judge a market only by working it yourself. As one very canny vendor put it, "Nobody can tell you what you will do in a certain market. People there will buy from one person and not from another." I would say the merchandise has more to do with it than the person selling it, but as for the first part of his statement, I couldn't agree more.

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

Whether you are selling unwanted household items at the local swap meet on one weekend or are a professional dealer with a large setup, there are a number of items which can prove beneficial. Some may be necessary for one vendor and not for another, but there are a few which everyone can use.

At the very least, you need to be able to make change. If you are merely cleaning out the garage and your prices are quite low, you are probably safe just being able to change a $20 bill. A professional vendor with a large setup and several helpers will need to start the day with several hundred dollars in change. Some wear aprons with several pockets to hold coins and bills of various denominations. Others use trucker's wallets. These are larger than the normal wallet and have a chain which attaches to the belt, a good defense against pickpockets. Still others use a cash register or cash drawer.

In addition to change and an apron or wallet to hold it, the bare minimum of equipment and supplies I would recommend are:

Tables and Table Covers

Folding Chair(s)

Notebook and Pencil (for notes on markets, what you might want to bring next week, names and addresses of customers who request a special item, etc.)

Ice Chest (take your lunch, you may not get a chance to get to the snack bar)

Thermos (for hot or cold drinks, depending on the weather)

At an outdoor market, sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat or cap and suntan lotion should also be considered necessities. A beach umbrella or canopy is also necessary if you have skin cancer or are otherwise sensitive to sunlight.

Even in the Sun Belt, rain can be a problem. We learned that the hard way. Very early in our first full season of selling, one little cloud drifted over the market we were working. It dumped a load of rain out of all

proportion to its size and ruined 42 of our pieces. The following Monday we bought a large roll of 6 mil plastic to cover our tables. If the weather even looks threatening, we attach the plastic to the backs of the tables. It can be unhooked and thrown over the tables in a matter of seconds. If you work under a canopy, it's still a good idea to have plastic sheets or tarps to cover your merchandise. Even a light breeze can whip the rain under the canopy.

Additional items, which always come in handy, include:

Masking Tape

Price Tags or Stickers

Clipboard (especially necessary if you take credit cards as you can put the charge slip on it for the customer to sign)

Scissors

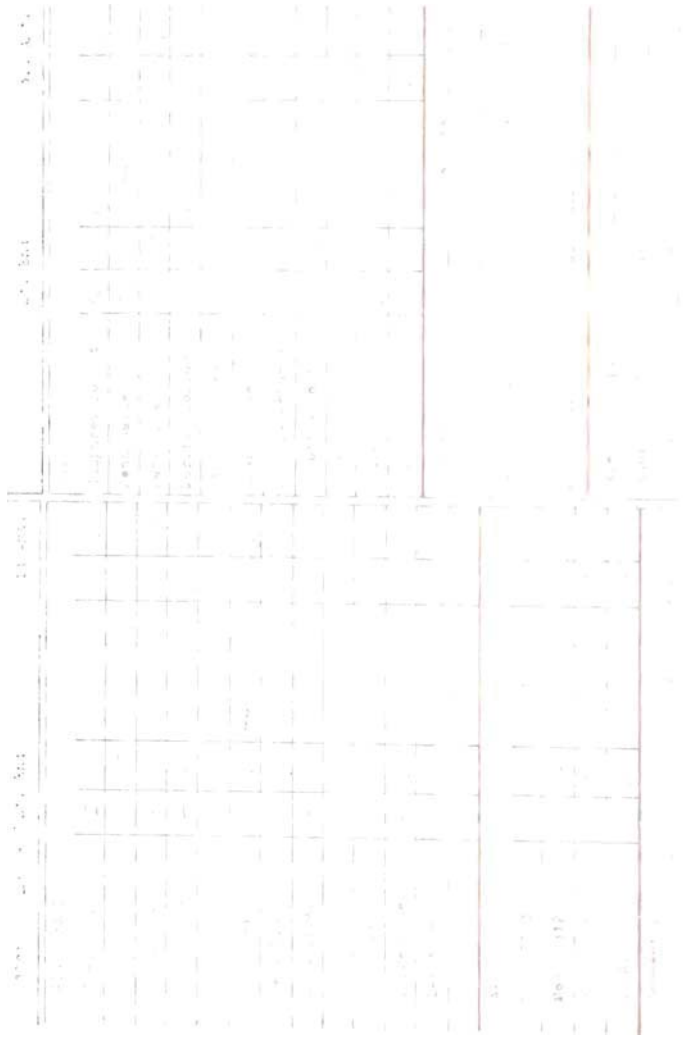
Clothespins and/or Large Clamps

Bungie Chords (almost unknown outside swap meets, but used for one purpose or another by most vendors)

Feather Duster

A professional dealer selling a variety of merchandise will also find an inventory sheet handy. Its actual contents will vary according to individual needs, but should reflect starting inventory, number of each item sold and stock remaining at the end of the day. This will enable you to keep a running count of sales throughout the day, determine what is selling best and what you need to order for the following weekend. Most professional vendors use some type of inventory sheet. The simplest I have seen was used by a fellow who sold windbreakers. He simply divided a sheet of notebook paper into four equal parts, one for each selling day of the week.

He would then put a check mark in the appropriate section every time he made a sale. Our sheet is more complicated but quite easy to use. A sample of it, revised to show general merchandise rather than our specialized items, is included in this chapter. The sample will obviously not fit your needs as-is, but can serve as a guideline for designing your own.



I am constantly amazed at the number of vendors who don't have sacks or bags for their merchandise. Customers certainly appreciate them, especially if they buy several items. Plastic bags imprinted with your business name and location are nice if you can afford them, but aren't really necessary. If nothing else, ask your friends and neighbors to save grocery bags for you. It's a cheap way to go and beats the heck out of no bags at all.

If your merchandise is quite unique, a brochure or handout sheet may be necessary to educate the general public. This was mentioned in the chapter on merchandising but is important enough to deserve further attention. Such flyers will cost a few bucks for typesetting, layout and printing, but can be well worth the expenditure. We have handed out thousands in the last few seasons. I have only seen one in a swap meet trash can during that time. People take them home to read, then come back the next day or next week to buy. In the long run, these handouts are very cheap advertising.

Business cards are also important and can increase credibility with customers and suppliers alike far out of proportion to their cost. Vendors who sell high ticket items usually don't list their physical address for obvious reasons. Instead, they will give a PO box number or say "Call for Appointment." An alternate solution is to use the swap meet space numbers for an address.

Other useful items will depend on your individual needs. We have a large tool box containing needle-nosed pliers, S hooks, an X-acto knife, pencils and pencil sharpener, C-clamps, a tack hammer and what seems to be at least one of every item know to mankind. Each fills one of our needs, but may not be appropriate in your case. You can only determine what you are likely to need after working swap meets for a few weekends. The one item which should prove most useful for everyone is a

small pocket calculator. You may need to add up multiple purchases, and it's easy to make a mistake in arithmetic if you are extremely busy or are tired at the end of a long day.

A basic tool kit containing a claw hammer, pliers, a small package of screws and nails, screwdrivers and wrenches is always handy for minor repairs. You never know when you might have to replace a broken headlight or hammer a display fixture back together. Last, but not least, include a set of jumper cables. We have encountered more than one vendor who left his or her trunk lid up or car door open all day long. When it was time to pull out, their battery was either dead or so low that it wouldn't start their car.

TRANSPORTATION

Depending on a particular vendor's needs, there are a number of vehicles which are entirely suitable for transporting merchandise and displays to and from swap meets. Unless you are especially affluent, however, you will want to begin with whatever you already have,

then graduate to something more appropriate as the situation and financial resources warrant it.

We started out working out of the trunk of the car, along with what we could cram into the back seat and still be able to see through the rear window. Within a couple of months, our inventory and the size of our display had grown to the point where we had to switch to our pickup, which is a *big* one. In fact, one fellow nicknamed it Galactica, after the famous TV spaceship of several years ago. Even this seems too small at times, although we are making do with it.

The ideal vehicle for your needs will depend on the size of your display and amount of merchandise, how much overnight traveling you will do, etc. One vendor we know started out with a small station wagon. He bought a larger one when he outgrew the first. His next vehicle was a small van. From there he went on to a large van, ultimately peaking out with a large motor home and cargo trailer. Even as he was trading up to bigger and more expensive transportation, he was still able to afford tuition for 3 kids in private schools. His success story is exceptional, but it *does* happen.

Basically, you can count yourself lucky if you already own a normal-sized station wagon, van or pickup with a shell camper. Compacts are great for gas mileage, but don't have much cargo space. Larger vehicles may require more frequent fill-ups, but they allow you to haul more merchandise, resulting in more sales. Maintenance will cost more, but not disproportionately so until you get into the Mack truck class. Check out the price of an oil change on one of those babies!

Just about any type of vehicle will be found at most swap meets, but the most common is probably a Ford SuperCab pickup with a shell camper. It's what we use, and it has its cousin parked on either side of us at our

winter market. They differ only in color and year of manufacture. If yours is to be a one-vehicle family with a pickup, a SuperCab (or its Chevy or Dodge equivalent) is the *only* way to go. A possible exception would be a Crew Cab, which is the four-door equivalent. Both have front and rear seats and can double as the family sedan if necessary.

I understand the 351 engine has been beefed up on later models and has more power, but on older ones it just can't pull a heavy load up steep grades without straining. If you are looking for a used SuperCab, try to find one with a 460 engine unless almost all your driving is in the flatlands or the city. Our poor old 351 has served us well, but it has to struggle on mountain roads.

There are a number of firms in the West which specialize in customizing or converting SuperCabs and Crew Cabs to a customer's specifications. Some of these conversions can get *very* fancy.

One cold morning last winter, I was sitting in our truck waiting for the sun to come up. My wife had gone to visit another vendor. She was on her way back to our spaces just as a particularly outstanding SuperCab conversion drove by several rows below us. She ran up to our truck and threw open the passenger door. "Did you see that?" she yelled. I was already bailing out the door on my side, notebook in hand. We went over to the area where the truck had stopped and asked the owner if we could examine it. He readily agreed.

The truck turned out to be one of several which had been customized to the specifications of a dealer in Colorado. From its diesel engine and dual rear wheels to chrome running boards and accessory lights of every description, it was one of the nicest custom jobs we had ever seen. I wrote down the name and address of the

dealer for future reference, especially when the owner told me what he had paid for the rig. It was far less than I would have guessed.

If you would prefer a van to a pickup, try to get one that opens at both the rear and side. At some locations, it may be easier to work out of the rear while impossible at another. By having access to your cargo either way, you are hedging your bets nicely.

After working swap meets for awhile, you will discover that some vendors who refer to their "motor home" are actually referring to a converted school bus. If you can do the conversion yourself, this can be a pretty economical way to give yourself both cargo space and living quarters. A few vendors even go to the expense of converting a Scenic Cruiser or other long-haul busses. This costs more, but is still cheaper than a top-of-the-line motor home. The latter can cost upward of $200,000, and you still have the problem of cargo storage. A conversion, on the other hand, can be custom designed to fit your individual needs.

Earlier I mentioned the fellow who worked his way up to a large motor home and cargo trailer. This is a fairly common combination for the more affluent retirees who travel a lot. I have even seen rigs where the trailer was custom built to match the motor home. Going in the opposite direction, a friend of mine bought a small, used motor home and gutted the interior to make a large cargo van. He pulls a small travel trailer for eating and sleeping quarters.

One of the most ingenious rigs I have ever seen is owned by a horse rancher who works swap meets on weekends. He took an old tour bus which had been rolled and lowered and shortened it to make a long horse trailer. Its primary purpose is *not* obvious at first glance. From the outside, it looks like a giant cargo trailer. Its

owner can haul as many as 10 horses at once during the week. On Fridays he merely cleans it out, packs his merchandise into it, and heads for the nearest large swap meet. He says his diesel SuperCab pulls the trailer and its cargo with no trouble at all.

Despite the number of fairly expensive vehicles driven by some vendors, a few of the most successful purposely drive rather nondescript ones. They normally carry a large amount of cash and transport an extensive (and expensive) inventory. For these reasons, they wish to appear as low profile as possible. On the street, their cars and vans are pretty nondescript. No one would suspect they were carrying literally thousands and thousands of dollars worth of jewelry.

Some vendors even swear their sales are better if they drive an older vehicle. One lady told me that if she took her husband's brand new pickup to the swap meet, she would have a bad selling day. If she drove her old car, business would be better as people tended to think she really needed the sale. Of course, it's possible to carry the low profile image a bit too far. Our truck was in the garage for an oil change recently. The mechanic commented that its exterior was far dirtier than the old oil he was replacing. He offered to run the truck through the car wash free. "No way!" my wife replied. "You're not going to ruin my camouflage."

At the opposite extreme is the carnival vendor who decided to spruce up her image. Although she looked like a refugee from Lower Slobbovia, she was literally a walking moneybag. When she went to the nearest Cadillac dealer, no one paid any attention to her except a young salesman who had just gone to work for the agency. After a few moments it became obvious that she was more than casually interested in a particular model. A price was agreed upon and the salesman asked her

how she wanted to finance her purchase. She said she wasn't going to finance the car, but would pay in cash.

She then proceeded to unbutton her blouse right on the show room floor and reach for her bankroll in a bag suspended around her neck. With mouths agape at the exposure of both female chest and greenbacks, the sales manager and other personnel watched as she counted out the purchase price in large denomination bills. The sales manager then proceeded to inform her that he would have the salesman see that her car was serviced and ready for delivery that afternoon. "*You* see that the car is ready, buster!" she said, pointing her finger at the sales manager. "This young fella and I are gonna go out and get drunk!" And get drunk they did. The next morning, the salesman was much wiser about over-indulgence and the sales manager had learned a valuable lesson about judging people strictly by appearance.

SHOW YOUR COUTH

Most of the contents of this chapter should be just a matter of common sense. Based on experience, I can attest that some vendors don't have much common sense, at least when presenting themselves to the public. If ignorance is bliss, they must be among the happiest people in the world.

No one expects a vendor to dress like James Bond about to dine with M and the prime minister. But do they have to go to the opposite extreme? All too many show up with several days' growth of beard, dressed as if they are about to scrub out the garbage can. Some have horrendously gross beer bellies hanging out below their T-shirts and a case of rancidius armpitus which would do justice to a slave on a Roman galley. Anyone standing downwind dares not breathe without dropping to ground level.

As if the above offenses aren't enough, these vendors are often guzzling beer and smoking a foul-smelling cigar. Their typical sales approach might be something like: "Hey, you! When the *#%@# are you gonna buy some of my #@%$ stuff? If I don't sell a %#&@# bunch of it my *#@%# wife won't let me in the #&%*@# house tonight."

Although day vendors are the worst offenders, I have seen pros who sell top quality, new merchandise look just about as bad. They simply don't realize that personal appearance and conduct can attract customers — or drive them away.

There is nothing wrong with dressing comfortably to sell at swap meets, provided your clothes are clean and in good taste. One vendor I know wears a T-shirt and Bermudas in warm weather. Since his clothes are always spotless and he is clean-shaven, he is perfectly presentable as well as comfortable. He has good manners, a friendly disposition and never uses foul language. There is just something about him that invites the customer to stop and look at his merchandise.

Men aren't the only offenders when it comes to dress and personal conduct. Some women feel more comfortable going braless, but would probably give up the practice if they saw themselves in a mirror. There is

nothing appealing about a bustline that sags below the waistline or a cleavage well laced with varicose veins. Women who wear shorts and don't shave their legs run the risk of being mistaken for first cousins of King Kong. A few are chain smokers and have vocabularies that would make a longshoreman blush.

By contrast, other female vendors dress attractively yet comfortably and conduct themselves in a ladylike manner. These are the ones you tend to notice and remember. If they wear shorts, they might have a contrasting top and a straw hat with a scarf or hatband to match the shorts. One lady who comes to mind always wears high heels and a simple, basic black dress which is striking with her black hair and deep tan. Her outfit may seem odd for a swap meet, but in reality it doesn't look at all out of place. The most incongruous thing is the fact that she sells used merchandise out of the back of her pickup, not gold jewelry or perfume.

A vendor selling Harley T-shirts and biker rings isn't going to offend his customers if he has a beer in his hand. However, a person selling diamond earrings or vacuum cleaners runs the risk of customer disapproval if he takes a couple of swigs of beer in the middle of his sales presentation. Some people are offended by drinking, some aren't. It's best to assume that most customers are and leave the beer at home.

Language which may be commonplace in a waterfront bar is definitely not appropriate at a swap meet where women and impressionable children are present. It's quite common for adolescents to think they can impress or shock you by using foul language. Most people outgrow this stage, but some don't. Adults who can't speak a single sentence without resorting to numerous invectives have a communications problem. Fortunately, this problem can be cured with a little conscious effort and

practice. It's not too difficult to change "This #$%@ thing doesn't work worth a &$#!" to "This dumb thing doesn't work worth a hoot!" The actual meaning is the same, but the phraseology is far more acceptable.

Actually, many vendors who present an otherwise favorable appearance have offensive habits of which they are unaware. Nose picking in public is very uncouth, yet people do it unconsciously all the time. Others don't realize just how often they turn around and spit while talking to customers. Some chew gum in a rapid-fire fashion and pop it so often it sounds like a machine gun.

More often than not, a vendor will be interrupted while eating. He can't help it if he is already chewing a mouthful of food when a customer enters his stall. He can avoid stuffing his face further and talking with his mouth full, smacking his lips, licking his fingers or otherwise displaying table manners worthy of a Russian peasant.

Recently I caught myself displaying bad manners in a very unintentional way. I have probably made the same mistake dozens of times without realizing it, maybe even hundreds. A customer walked up to me and asked the prices of some of our more expensive pieces on the backboards. As I pointed to each piece and quoted the price, I suddenly realized I was talking to the backboards and not to the customer. Even if she could hear me, she was still staring at the back of my head. I had forgotten that all-important eye contact.

If you have access to a videotape camera, by all means tape yourself making an imaginary sales pitch. Even go so far as to have a friend pose as a customer and ask some typical questions about your merchandise, prices, etc. Play the tape back and watch for any errors you may have made. I know of one sales school that uses this

technique with excellent results. Students can observe their mistakes and correct them before they have a chance to repeat them in the field.

In the final analysis, a swap meet vendor should avoid offensive conduct and should dress in a manner which is comfortable yet appropriate for the season and the type of merchandise he is selling. An unemployed mechanic would look ridiculous wearing a suit and tie while looking for work. He should wear clean, neatly pressed work clothes instead. He could then start work immediately if the opportunity presented itself. In the same vein, a person seeking employment as a Cadillac salesman should wear a suit, not Levi's and a muscle shirt. Working swap meets should still be considered a job, even if most vendors are their own bosses. There are very few jobs where an employer will tolerate someone who drinks beer all day, talks like a drunken sailor and dresses like a skid row bum. Customers tend to shy away from vendors who conduct themselves in the same manner.

A famous comedian once asked, "Ain'tcha got no couth?" If you have couth (it's an actual word), show it. If not, don't advertise the fact

BUG THY NEIGHBOR

The vast majority of swap meet vendors are among the nicest people you will ever want to meet. The same statement could also be made of customers. However, there are always a few who can get under your skin. Some are merely thoughtless, ignorant and inconsider-

ate. A few are losers who could run unopposed for the presidency and still lose by a landslide. A very, very small percentage are just plan low-lifes who should be rejected from the human race. The following examples are all based on real people and incidents, although a couple of individuals are actually composites of several. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty. Whether you are a vendor or customer, a guaranteed way to make sure most vendors never want to see you again is to act like one of these characters.

Nellie Nerd. Although probably not too bad a gal in her own realm, Nellie was definitely out of that realm at the swap meet. Her first offense was arriving at 10:30 in the morning. Since she couldn't maneuver her full-sized car into the single inside space she had purchased, she asked the vendors on either side to move their tables. This didn't set well with them, as they were well within their space limits and had been set up for several hours. They therefore had to direct Nellie into her space as best they could.

After finally getting her car into her space, Nellie proceeded to spread her junk out 6 feet into the aisle (twice the legal limit). Not content with that, she played dumb about space boundaries and also spread out in front of her neighbor's stalls. Her well-used porta-potty wound up smack in front of some *very* expensive merchandise. When informed she was beyond her limits, Nellie replied, "Don't tell anybody, okay?" Since she had only one space, she naturally brought along several friends to help out. They immediately set up their folding chairs in the back of another vendor's space (without asking if they could) and proceeded to make themselves at home. Since Nellie hadn't brought along any change, she had to bother other vendors for change any time she made a sale. Thoroughly frustrated, they began to make things

uncomfortable for her in very subtle ways. She decided to pull out early.

Her neighbors breathed a sigh of relief, but too soon. It seems Nellie had left her trunk lid up, so her battery was dead. The vendor behind her immediately offered to give her a jump. She accepted, and after much maneuvering again, was finally able to back out of her space and be on her way. When asked why he had been so anxious to help such an obnoxious broad, who had been a thorn in his side all day, her neighbor replied, "It was worth it to get rid of her that much sooner."

To ensure they would never see Nellie or someone like her again, the vendors on either side of her went up to the office and bought the space she had occupied for the rest of the season.

Oscar Obnoxious. This guy first got under everybody's skin on a morning when rain clouds were looming on the horizon. "What's the matter, afraid of a little rain?" he asked of one vendor who simply couldn't have her merchandise get wet. He then endeared himself to others by using a ridiculous sales pitch on every customer who walked by. His neighbors were thoroughly sick of it by the hundredth time, yet they had to endure it several hundred more before the day was over. Murder with malice was in the hearts of more than one, but Oscar redeemed himself in the end. When a fellow vendor was trying to maneuver his large motor home out of a particularly difficult spot, Oscar was the first to volunteer to direct him. In talking to him later, a neighbor decided Oscar was actually a decent enough guy, he just had a bad personality problem.

Tillie Talkathon. You probably know someone just like poor Tillie. She's really a nice person, but should be listed in *Guinness' Book Of World Records* for her ability to recite Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in less than 10

seconds. She has a machine gun mouth that can start working on New Years' Eve and not stop until the Fourth of July. Sometimes what she has to tell you is important, but usually not. Naturally, Tillie only wants to talk to you when you are busy setting up, tearing down, or trying to wait on several customers at once. She is simply never around when things are slow and you would welcome the sound of her voice just to help you stay awake. Of course, she also has her male counterpart who likewise shows up at the most inopportune times.

Sylvester Skinflint. This guy is usually a customer but at times may be another vendor. He doesn't think he should pay full price for anything at a swap meet, and lets the world know it in no uncertain terms. In a loud voice that would scare a Doberman pinscher half a block away, he will complain, "What? $15 for that? It's not worth more than 10. I wouldn't pay more than $10 for that." The last time a guy pulled this one on me, he was far enough away that I simply ignored him. If he had been closer, I would have replied, "Then you're not going to buy it, because I won't sell it for a cent less than $15." If Sylvester is a fellow vendor, negotiate if you want to, but you are under no obligation to give him a special deal. Some vendors voluntarily offer discounts to their neighbors. If one extends you this courtesy, he deserves a "thank you" at the least. You might also offer him a discount, and return the favor.

Donna Dimwit. "Tis better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt," is one of my favorite sayings. Poor Donna can ask some of the dumbest questions imaginable, especially when the answers are usually right in front of her. Some examples are:

> "Do you make these yourself?" (The 3-foot tall sign over your display proclaims "Genuine

Navajo Rugs.") "How much is this?" (There is a price tag in plain sight on the object she indicates, plus a 3 x 5 card indicating the price in front of it.) "Oh, are you packing already?" (As you put the last box in the truck.) Or:

"Why are you packing so soon? Do you think it's going to rain?" (The cloudburst is already at the far end of the swap meet and moving your way fast.) Or:

"Where is everybody? I thought there was a swap meet here." (The sun is sinking below the horizon and you are one of the last half dozen vendors still packing.) "Is this the 12-inch size?" (Your sign gives prices by size and the one she's pointing at is 3 feet tall.) "Are these really made in Mexico?" (She has just looked at the back, which has a "Made In Mexico" sticker on it. You tell her no, they're actually made in Taiwan, and she believes you.)

Donna is probably the most exasperating character of all, simply because she appears so frequently. I think she must be a regular customer at every swap meet in the country.

Lester Litterbug. At home, Lester probably has a half a dozen junkie old cars propped up on bricks in his front yard, which hasn't been watered or mowed since 1967. Even the cockroaches have declared the inside of the house off limits. Lester isn't much better at the swap meet. Count yourself lucky indeed if he is next to you and merely commandeers one of your merchandise boxes for a trash container. He usually dumps peanut shells, orange peels and beer cans on the ground. Of course, he might let his St. Bernard use the side of one of your boxes as a substitute for a fire hydrant. Lester is *persona non grata* at one large swap meet after dump-

ing the holding tank of his RV in his spaces two weekends in a row. Just minutes after hearing of this, the manager handed Lester his cancelled contract and a warning never to return. Being a born loser, Lester is probably still complaining about the shabby way he was treated.

Sammy Spacehog. Although a nice guy, Sammy has one problem. He can never seem to buy enough spaces to accommodate his motor home. You guessed it, the spare tire and rear bumper project into *your* space, usually by at least 3 feet. We were next to Sammy once, and solved the problem by parking so our front bumper was actually touching his. As I told my wife, we weren't really losing much out of our front space, and it definitely prevented people from cutting between the vehicles. You can endure Sammy for a day if he isn't intruding too deeply into your territory. If he is, complain to him in a nice way. If he won't do anything about it, complain to the management. After all, you are entitled to use all the space you paid for.

Sammy also sometimes appears as the guy who shows up late, just like Nellie Nerd. As a latecomer, he never, ever drives a little compact, but insists on trying to crowd his stretched van or monster-sized pick-up into a single inside space. He could have solved the problem by paying a couple of bucks more for an end space, but didn't. When this happens, tell him to unload his merchandise and you will keep an eye on it while he goes and parks in the parking lot. This will often get some cooperation from Sammy, but not always.

Connie Conniver and Denny Devious. This pair deserve a special place in history for their record-class chameleon act. On the surface they appeared to be nice people, but they revealed their true colors toward the end of our winter's season.

As many contract vendors had already left for other markets, their prime spaces were available on a first-come, first-served basis. Realizing this, some of the remaining vendors would wait until after the deadline for picking up contract tickets, then buy unclaimed spaces rather than their normal ones. This practice was perfectly legitimate and in accordance with swap meet regulations. When Harriet discovered that Connie's and Denny's spaces were available for the following weekend, she assumed they had left for the season. She then purchased the tickets for what were normally some of their spaces, as it was four days past their deadline to claim them. Her friend Dick bought the remaining spaces, which Harriet didn't need.

The following Saturday morning, Harriet and her husband Tom, along with Dick and his wife, started to set up in their new locations. About 8:30, when they were more than half set up, Denny arrived on the scene and demanded to know what they were doing in his spaces. When informed they had tickets and thought he had left for the season, Denny produced tickets for the *following* Saturday. Harriet pointed out the error in dates and said they were sorry, but they were just about set up and were in no mood to tear down and set up again elsewhere.

About this time, Connie drove up and threw a temper tantrum. She was nearly incoherent with rage. Nearby vendors halfway expected a mushroom cloud to erupt from the top of her head. She claimed it wasn't her fault if she had the wrong tickets. It was up to the office to give her the right ones and she shouldn't have to check them. Harriet and Dick suggested they all go up to the office and try to work out an equitable solution, but Connie refused. *They* were in the wrong by being in her spaces, so *they* should go to the office and get things straightened out.

Harriet and party should have been suspicious at this point, but were still thinking in terms of a possible error on the part of the office staff. They didn't realize until later that Connie and Denny both had at least a half dozen reasons on the tips of their tongues as to why they should have the spaces, even though they had the wrong tickets.

Tom should have *really* caught on when Denny asked, "Have you ever worked this swap meet before?" He later remembered that Connie had purchased Denny's Christmas present from Harriet, and had even sent him over to her stall to pick it out! He and Denny had also talked together on friendly terms several times hence, so it should have been obvious Denny's question was just a diversion to help get his own way. (Although he pretended not to recognize them at the time, Denny recognized Tom and Harriet readily enough at the beginning of the next season.)

Denny even claimed he and Connie would lose hundreds of dollars in sales if customers came looking for them and they weren't in their usual spaces. Realizing there was at least a grain of truth to this, Tom offered to refer anyone who came looking for them to whatever space they might be able to get for the day. This would have been simple enough, as there were spaces available only a short distance away, but Denny and Connie would have none of it.

To end the story, Tom and Harriet, along with Dick and his wife, finally tore down and moved to other spots just to keep the peace. They later learned that Connie had turned in her tickets for the weekend several days before, so she knew *before* arriving at the swap meet that she and Denny didn't have tickets for their space. They deliberately lied and created a scene just to get their own way. With the foreknowledge that they were

actually in the wrong, it's no wonder Connie and Denny could think of so many reasons why they should have claim to the disputed spaces. They had plenty of time to rehearse their acts!

Poetic justice prevailed, however. Later that afternoon, Harriet noticed that Connie and Denny had pulled out early, so they obviously lost "hundreds of dollars in sales." Harriet and her companions had a very good selling day, despite having to tear down, move and set up again, which consumed a lot of good selling time.

Although there are a few rotten apples like the pair described above, they are very few and far between. Most vendors will treat you fairly and even go out of their way to help you. This is most evident if there is a storm approaching. If you are still tearing down after others have finished, they will often come over and offer to help. This has happened to us several times. In one case, the storm hadn't yet arrived when we finished, so we were able to go help two other vendors. The last guy was just closing the tailgate on his pickup as the first raindrops began to fall. Had our neighbors been less thoughtful and cooperative, we wouldn't have been able to help him, and he and part of his merchandise would have been soaked

Smart vendors realize that cooperation even in the face of competition can be beneficial to all. I know of two who sell prerecorded tapes, with special emphasis on Country and Western. They could cut prices, spread rumors about "bootleg" tapes and otherwise go for the jugular vein. Instead, they actually refer customers back and forth. One will cover the other's stall in an emergency and they normally have coffee together every morning. Although they are competitors in every sense of the word, neither is out to take sales away from the other guy.

As an added bonus to other vendors, both keep the volume of their demonstration tapes at an acceptable level. If there's one common trait of most tape vendors, it's a tendency to blast the aisles with music. Whether they are deaf from too much volume or turn it all the way up because they are already deaf is anybody's guess.

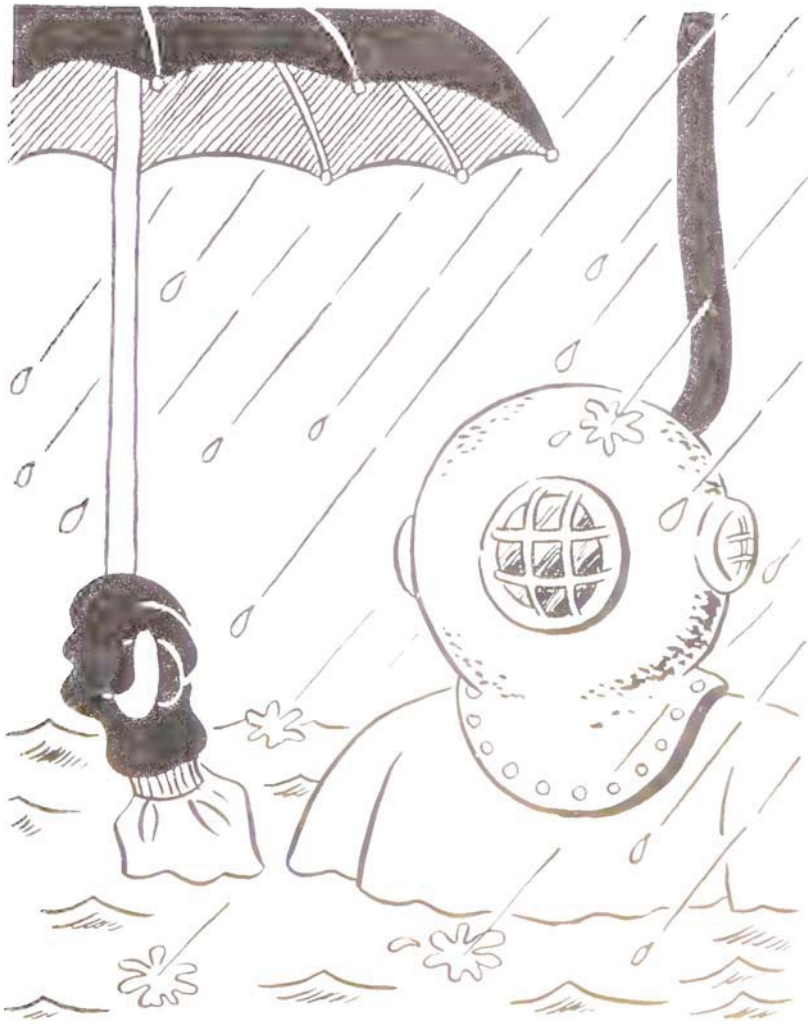
At one swap meet, there were several vendors who sold simular but non-conflicting types of merchandise. They began kicking around the idea of getting spaces next to each other. After all, car dealerships grouped together, so why shouldn't they? After hammering out the details, they were able to contract for a block of spaces adjoining each other. They made a gentleman's agreement not to carry *any* merchandise which would conflict with their neighbors'. An exception was made for one line which one of the vendors was closing out. They also agreed to do cooperative advertising on the swap meet's PA system. Word of their efforts soon spread to other vendors. Just one weekend after they first began working together, the fellow across the aisle began running announcements which read: "Come to the T-Shirt Shop in spaces F-21 through F-24, directly across from the Oriental Bazaar." Although those aren't the actual names, the ad does illustrate how quickly another vendor recognized their drawing power. Soon others were asking, "How are things going in the [illegible]?"

Thanks to public acceptance of the concept (almost a foregone conclusion), things were going very well. All of the vendors noticed a significant increase in sales. One customer commented, "I could decorate my entire [illegible] of these few stalls."

Several other vendors with quality merchandise and a reputation for honesty have since been invited to

participate in the Oriental Bazaar. A couple have declined as they don't want to surrender the prime spaces they already occupy. Others are giving the idea serious consideration, as they hear the scuttlebutt about how well the bazaar is doing. As the number of vendors grows, sales for each should increase accordingly. Rather than taking business away from each other, they actually attract it for one another. After selling a coffee table, a vendor may tell the customer, "Wouldn't one of those vases over there look nice on that table?" The vase dealer might then send the customer on to his neighbor who sells Oriental rugs. The end result is that everyone benefits without taking something away from the other guy. Cooperation which breeds success can be highly contagious. Don't be afraid to catch it.

THE WEATHER



One of these days I'm going to change merchandise and start selling ducks. After all, how much damage can rain do to a duck? Maybe I should sell boats instead. They're a much higher ticket item, and aren't boats supposed to get wet?

Ducks and boats aside, a great many items normally sold at swap meets are sensitive to rain. Some types of merchandise simply *can't* get wet, or they will be ruined. Others are impervious to rain, yet highly sensitive to direct sunlight or extreme variations in temperature. These factors should all be kept in mind when selecting merchandise for an outdoor market.

In the chapter entitled *Show Your Couth,* I referred to the fact that some people simply can't talk without using profanity. Most of the words they use are familiar to the average person, even though not a part of his everyday vocabulary. They may not trigger a noticeable response, no matter how offensive. There are some normally *inoffensive* four-letter words, however, that will send a swap meet vendor into a state of near-apoplexy. First and foremost is rain. Other words to be avoided include: wind, dust, dirt, snow and hail. If you want to add or drop a letter, sleet and fog aren't exactly popular on the [illegible]

Although its influence will vary from one part of the country to another, inclement weather will be a factor at virtually *all* outdoor swap meets. For this reason, some markets feature outdoor spaces which are permanently covered. This is especially true in Florida, although I have seen them in Arizona as well.

Phoenix is in the middle of the desert, where there is generally very little rainfall throughout the year. When it does rain there, it's not unusual for streets to flood and become temporarily impassable. In the late 1970's, Phoenix suffered three major floods in the space of 20 months. Each was of a magnitude that was supposed to occur only once in every 150 to 500 years. Most bridges over the normally dry Salt River were closed. People

who lived on the opposite side from which they worked had to get up as early as 2:30 in the morning to miss the main traffic jams across the two bridges that were open.

Some experienced vendors have developed an uncanny knack for predicting a sudden change in the weather, no matter what the predictions on the radio or TV the night before. They will suddenly feel that it's time to tear down, even though there are only a few clouds in the sky. Their neighbors will sit back and watch them with some amusement for awhile. A half hour later, after hearing a distant "ba-ba-ba-boom!" and seeing lightning on the horizon, they will decide to tear down. If they are lucky, they just might beat the storm. Their chances will improve greatly if they have helpful neighbors like those described at the end of the preceding chapter.

Although very little can actually be done about the weather, there are a few precautions which can be taken, especially against rain. Sometimes a storm will be a short duration and will break during the morning hours. If this occurs in a market which is best in the afternoon, a dealer could lose several hours' prime selling time by tearing down early. Many vendors work under canopies, which offer good protection from both sun *and* rain. They are a help, but are not a perfect solution, especially if they have flat roofs. A sudden cloudburst can dump several gallons of water on a flat roof in just a few minutes. The water will all drain to the center of the canopy, making it necessary to "bail" it by pushing up from below to drain the water off the sides. Canopies with peaked roofs are more expensive, but are far superior for water drainage. They also have more eye appeal since they aren't as common.

As mentioned before, some form of waterproof table cover is a good idea, even when working under a canopy. Many vendors use plastic tarps, but we prefer

long sheets of 6 mil transparent plastic. It prevents the merchandise for getting wet, yet still allows the customer to see it. We have made numerous sales from "under wraps" during threatening weather. In one case, a lady who had looked at our merchandise earlier in the day returned and pointed to several of our more expensive pieces. "I'll take that, that, that and that," she said. Had we been using tarps, we would have had to uncover the table for her to make her selection, thus risking rain damage. As it was, we made an $80 sale in a matter of seconds and nothing got wet.

Wind can be even more devastating than rain, especially if it is in the form of a dust devil. For those unfamiliar with the term, a dust devil is a small twister measuring no more than 50-60 feet across, usually less. These pesky little freaks of nature are quite common in the Southwest in the spring, summer and fall. A dust devil can completely flatten one vendor's display while leaving another untouched just a few yards away. Sometimes you can see one coming, but often it is too late to do anything but try to grab as much breakable merchandise as you can before it hits.

Far more common is a stiff breeze to heavy wind which blows all day long, or at least for several hours. When this happens, we use what we call our windy day setup. Our merchandise is displayed at an angle which is designed to offer as little wind resistance as possible. In some markets, we automatically use this setup, no matter how calm the air may be during the early morning hours. Experience has taught us to expect strong winds at some point during the day.

When working in a windy area, it is necessary to add weights to canopy support poles. A sudden gust of wind can lift canopy and poles alike several feet into the air, as the canopy acts just like a sail. If this happens, it can

literally take several men the size of linebackers to pull the ends of the poles back down to ground level. The sight of a Green Bay Packer hanging onto a pole in mid-air might be funny in a cartoon or movie, but there is nothing humorous about it in real life. Unsecured poles and canopies have caused more than one serious injury, including concussions and broken bones. For this reason, we prefer our umbrellas to canopies. They feature a quick release feature which allows us to drop them in just a couple of seconds if we get a sudden gust of strong wind. The lowered umbrellas will sway in the wind, but they won't blow away. Although commercial canopy weights are available, many vendors make their own by filling antifreeze bottles with water or coffee cans with cement. Either type works, although the latter is preferable in cold weather due to freezing which could turn water to ice and burst the bottles.

In addition to canopies, anything else which can be blown away should be secured on windy days. The backboards in our display are attached to our truck with bungie chords. They can blow forward only so far before stopping. If blown backward, they will simply come to rest against the truck. We also weight the bottoms of them with jugs of water

Perhaps the worst combination of weather conditions, barring a tornado or hurricane, is a dust storm followed by a light rain. First everything gets dusty, then rain-splattered. In the Southwest this is known as a 6-inch rain, meaning 6 inches between drops. The merchandise may not be ruined, but it will need a thorough cleaning to make it saleable. It's usually possible to see a dust storm coming a few minutes in advance. This will give you a chance to cover your display and secure the covers against the wind. Also be sure to pick up any empty boxes and put them away, otherwise you may still be looking for them a week later. Once all is secure,

about the only thing you can do is get under cover yourself and wait out the storm. Dust storms followed by rain usually don't last long, although there can be exceptions.

Just about any type of merchandise or display fixture which can be damaged by rain should also be protected from fog. This is sometimes easier said than done, as fog can creep under a canopy where rain doesn't reach unless windblown. How well I remember one foggy morning last winter. As fog was extremely rare in our area, we knew it would burn off fairly soon, but when? We set up our tables, but left the merchandise in its boxes. To pass the time, I climbed in the back of the pickup and trimmed rabbit skins. Whether the fog's effect was real or just psychological I couldn't say, but it seemed like that was the coldest morning of the entire winter season. The fog finally lifted about 11:00, and we had an excellent selling day in the few hours we were set up. We matched our daily average gross sales in just a couple of hours, and one lady bought 21 pieces from us. She came back the following day and bought even more.

Even areas which are noted for mild winters may occasionally be subject to extreme cold spells. It can even snow in the Sun Belt, believe it or not. If you arrive at your winter market and find that it is snowing, about the safest course of action is to go back home. The customers simply won't be out, so there is no sense staying at the swap meet, even if your space rent is already paid. Just write that day off as a lost cause and either go back to bed or curl up in front of the fireplace with a good book.

If the weather is merely cold, but the sun is shining, go ahead and set up. You can keep warm by taking a huge thermos of coffee, tea or hot chocolate and by

dressing in layers. I usually start out on cold mornings with a thermal undershirt, longsleeved shirt, fleece-lined vest, Levi jacket and fleece-lined jacket. My wife will wear a turtleneck sweater with a blouse over it, then a regular wool sweater and down-filled parka. As the temperature rises, we shed the outer layers progressively so that we are never too cold nor too hot, but just comfortable.

In the summer, we carry plenty of ice water, iced tea and cold pop with us, as dehydration can be a problem in warm weather. Don't expect to find drinking fountains on the grounds if they are set up strictly for swap meets. With no water available, the concession stands will sell more beer, pop and iced tea. Since many of the better summer markets are located in the mountains or the northern portion of the Midwest, it's a good idea to have a light jacket for the early morning hours. Temperatures there tend to be a bit cool or even downright cold. It's better to have a jacket you don't need than to stand around shivering in short sleeves. We have learned from experience that it is best to have clothing for both cool and warm weather, no matter what part of the country you are in at a given time of the year. Boston can have a heat wave in February, or a cool spell can strike the Southwest deserts in July.

Once you have worked in a particular area for awhile, you should be able to judge what the weather will be on a given day with some accuracy. You won't be infallible, but should be right most of the time. This includes being able to guess fairly closely just how much time you have to pack in the face of an approaching storm. However, when the swap meet promoter comes by and starts refunding space rent, you *know* it's time to pack up — fast!

BATTEN ALL HATCHES

Everyone is familiar with the expression, "He would forget his head if it wasn't tacked on." While some people are more forgetful than others, just about anyone can forget to do one thing or another when they are tired at the end of a busy day. It's also very easy to be forgetful

early in the morning, when you haven't had that second cup of coffee yet and are more asleep than awake.

We have seen several vendors do some really silly things that could have been avoided with a little forethought, and have even done a couple ourselves. Results were only disastrous in one instance, and were actually pretty funny in a couple. Like the sign says, "Plan Ahead And Don't Make Mistakes."

Most people check under the hood occasionally and make sure the oil, radiator water, power steering fluid and battery water levels are okay. They check the air in the tires and bring them up to the proper pressure if necessary. The one thing they are most likely to forget is to turn off the lights after arriving at the swap meet. This is especially easy to do if the grounds are well lit, as is the case with most large markets. It's very easy to drive through town in the predawn hours, pull into a swap meet that is lit up like a football field, and forget that your lights are on. Usually another vendor will notice this and tell you, but don't count on it. I solved the problem by automatically shutting the lights off as we are pulling through the gate. This is a good way to remember the lights, but it takes awhile before the habit becomes second nature.

I have known several vendors who left their key in the ignition, then locked their doors. In one case, a couple each had a spare key as well as their regular sets. They went and locked all four keys inside their car. As luck would have it, there wasn't a single locksmith at the swap meet that day. On another day when there were no locksmiths around, I spent over an hour helping another vendor break into his vehicle. Since it was a Ford, we first tried both my car and truck keys. After all, there are only so many combinations for making a key, and the combinations do get repeated. No such luck in this case.

Using a screwdriver, bent coat hanger and a butcher knife, we were finally able to get the side wing open without doing any damage to the window, weather stripping or lock. However, it was frustrating work, especially after the first dozen or so times we *almost* got the handle to the point where we could just push the side wing in. I have locked my own keys in a time or two, but since my wife and I both carry spares, it hasn't been any great tragedy. We simply pulled out a spare and unlocked the door

At the opposite extreme, it is quite common for the vendor to forget to lock his camper shell or the back of the station wagon or van. Always double check them either before leaving the swap meet grounds or at the first stop afterward.

It is also very easy to forget to secure the hitch on a cargo trailer at the end of the day. It's pretty amusing to watch someone back up to their trailer, supposedly hitch it to the car, then pull out with the car going one way and the trailer another after the first few feet. Usually the trailer will come to a stop without hitting anything. However, don't count on it, especially if there is a large china and glassware display nearby.

One poor fellow I know was especially tired at the end of a long, busy day. He started to pull out of his space with his canopy still set up and attached to his truck. Even though the results could have been disastrous, it was funny watching his wife hanging onto a support pole with one hand and her hat with the other as she ran down the aisle shouting, "Frank! Frank! Stop the truck!" Fortunately, she was able to maintain her balance and he stopped before the entire canopy toppled to the ground

Luggage racks on tops of cars can be handy things, provided you remember to secure your load. One vendor

who sold golf clubs forgot to do just that before starting home. When he stopped for a red light a couple of miles down the road, clubs, bags, and folding chairs all slid forward and bounced off his hood. They finally landed in the middle of the road, right in front of his car. Naturally, it all happened right in the midst of rush hour traffic. Again, no real damage was done and what could have been a dangerous situation proved only to be highly embarrassing

To ensure that we don't leave anything behind, my wife and I make a practice of walking completely around our truck each evening. We even check underneath it. Several times we have found boxes which had been blown out of sight by the wind, or which we had placed under the tailgate to get them out of the way. We forgot this last minute inspection one afternoon, with results which were interesting to say the least. Since our winter market is paved, we use a can of roadway marking paint to spray small, unobtrusive dots on the pavement. That way we know exactly where to place the legs of our tables every morning. On that particular afternoon, I had set the can down next to the front tire and had promptly forgotten it. As we pulled out at night, we heard what sounded like a muffled explosion. Looking in the side mirror, we saw what we left of the mutilated can rolling across the pavement. Believe me, a 6-foot wide splotch of fluorescent pink paint is *very* noticeable on blacktop.

Some vendors who drive motor homes put chocks in front of or behind the wheels. Others will level their rigs by running one or more wheels up on boards, especially at a dirt market. Occasionally, they forget to remove the chocks, and wonder why the motor home isn't moving when they step on the gas. Usually, they realize what the problem is even before they get out to check the wheels.

One poor lady didn't have any chocks to worry about, but ran right over a short stack of tables which she had left in front of her motor home. Needless to say, they were reduced to discards in just a couple of seconds.

Last but not least, don't forget the home front. Check all doors and windows before leaving for the swap meet in the morning. Make sure the toilet or kitchen faucet isn't running. If you have used the stove, double check the oven and all burners. Take a head count on indoor pets, especially if any females are in heat. It's usually pretty easy to tell if Fluffy is looking for male companionship, but not always. We had 5 kitties fool us by acting perfectly normal, so we let them out, much to our regret later. We returned home from an out-of-town swap meet one Monday night and found 5 newborn kittens behind the couch. A new litter was born every day for the next few days, giving us a grand total of 22 kittens scattered throughout the house. Imagine the fun we had finding homes for that many little bundles of fur!

IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE

As I said before, you can have the most desirable item in the world, at a ridiculously low price, but no one will buy it if they don't know you have it. The key to getting the word out is advertising.

No matter what an ad salesman will tell you, the most effective advertising is still word of mouth. A perfect

example is one sale we made this summer. A lady purchased one of our handcrafted clocks for $30 at a small swap meet we were working in a resort area. On her way back to the big city that afternoon, she stopped at a gift shop in another town. There she saw a similar clock made by the same person who made ours. When she inquired as to the price, the sales clerk told her, "The clocks are normally $80, but we're having a half price sale right now, so it's only $40." Needless to say, we had a *very* satisfied customer. She returned to the swap meet the following weekend and brought a friend, who also bought a clock. Within a month's time, we made two more sales to friends of the first lady, all because we price our merchandise fairly to begin with and don't play the "half off" game.

In another case, a lady from the East was visiting her father near our winter location. She wanted to buy a souvenir of the area at a large, swank department store. Her father told her, "Don't buy one of the those until you go to the swap meet." When she saw our prices, she was glad she had listened to him.

Of course, it takes time to build up word of mouth advertising. You should consider some alternatives until your business is established, and even afterward. If the swap meet you are working has paid announcements over the PA system and/or publishes a directory for the benefit of customers, by all means take advantage of them. These two methods of advertising were mentioned previously in another chapter, but deserve additional attention here. They are especially effective since they are targeted directly at people who are already at the swap meet. They don't have to get in their cars and drive several miles to find you, they just walk down the right aisle. As stated previously, we have had people walk up to our stall with the directory open to our ad in their hands — more than once.

When preparing an ad for a shopper's directory, bear in mind that the size of the ad isn't as important as the general layout. I have seen full page ads that were very ineffective while a business card size ad on the opposite page immediately caught my eye. Unusual art work, reverses (white type on a black background), diagonal lines and broken or unusual borders are all effective for attracting attention. Even an ad which contains no art work can be effective provided there is some variation in type styles and sizes. However, beware the pitfalls of choosing a typestyle which is difficult to read. Some forms of script and what is commonly called "Old English" fall into this category. The latter style is virtually impossible to read if used for more than a couple of words. Samples of effective ads featuring both art work and just type are included in this chapter.

Since most swap meet directories are handed out over a period of several weeks or months, ads should be general rather than timely. There is no point in advertising Halloween costumes or Thanksgiving cornucopias in a directory that will still be in use the following March! When using a discount coupon in your ad, consider including a cut-off date at the end of the season. If you don't someone may show up with one of your coupons several years hence and expect you to honor it. This can create a difficult situation if the coupon is for a specific item you no longer carry and can no longer get, even on special order

Announcements over PA systems are generally read live, or recorded daily, so you can make them as timely as you want. In some cases, they can even be changed during the day if you want. Samples of just how timely these ads can be are:

SUMMER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER, AND PEGGY'S BOUTIQUE HAS ALL THE LATEST STYLE SWIMSUITS, SUN DRESSES, HALTERS AND TOPS FOR WARM WEATHER COMFORT. REMEMBER, PEGGY SELLS ONLY FIRST QUALITY, NAME BRANDS AT THE LOWEST PRICES IN TOWN. STOP BY PEGGY'S BOUTIQUE IN SPACES K-THIRTY-EIGHT THROUGH FORTY.

YEAH, BRONCOS! AT HALFTIME THE BRONCOS ARE LEADING THE TROJANS EIGHTEEN TO THREE. STOP BY THE SPORTS DEN IN SPACE B-ELEVEN FOR A FREE BRONCOS BUMPER STICKER.

An hour or two later, the last ad might be changed to:

YEAH, BRONCOS! THE FINAL SCORE IS BRONCOS THIRTY AND TROJANS SEVENTEEN. STOP BY THE SPORTS DEN IN SPACE B-ELEVEN FOR A FREE BRONCOS BUMPER STICKER. LET OUR NEW STATE CHAMPS KNOW THEY'RE *YOUR* TEAM!

AL'S SURPLUS STORE HAS JUST MADE A SPECIAL PURCHASE OF JUNGLE BOOTS AND IS PASSING THE SAVINGS ON TO YOU. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST, THESE BRAND NEW BOOTS ARE JUST TEN DOLLARS A PAIR. SALE PRICE LIMITED TO STOCK ON HAND, SO SHOP EARLY WHILE AL STILL HAS A WIDE RANGE OF SIZES. THAT'S AL'S SURPLUS STORE IN SPACE T-SEVEN THROUGH TEN.

A more general ad, which could be run at any time of the year, might read something like this:

ATTENTION SHOPPERS! TRADER BILL'S INDIAN MARKET INVITES YOU TO STOP BY AND SEE

THE LATEST SELECTION OF NAVAHO RUGS, PUEBLO POTTERY AND APACHE BEADWORK DIRECT FROM THE RESERVATIONS. REMEMBER, TRADER BILL CARRIES ONLY THE FINEST IN AUTHENTIC INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS. EACH PIECE IS ONE-OF-A-KIND, SO SHOP EARLY FOR BEST SELECTION. TRADER BILL'S INDIAN MARKET IS LOCATED IN SPACES M-TWENTY-ONE THROUGH TWENTY-FIVE, JUST WEST OF THE RESTROOMS.

Anyone knowledgeable about the Southwest will notice that I intentionally misspelled the word Navajo as Navaho in the last ad. Many words of Indian, Spanish or French origin are pronounced differently than they are spelled. When writing ad copy which is to be read aloud, it sometimes pays to spell words the way they are pronounced, as the person reading the copy may be unfamiliar with them. This may seem far-fetched, but I once heard a radio announcer who was obviously new to the area butcher three place names in as many minutes while giving a weather report. You can bet the station manager gave him a crash course on pronunciation as soon as he was off the air!

Although the cost of advertising on PA systems and in swap meet directories is pretty low, the cost to individual vendors can be reduced even more by using group advertising. The success of the Oriental Bazaar in working together and cooperating was chronicled in a previous chapter. A group ad for them might read something like:

ATTENTION SHOPPERS! THE FRIENDLY MERCHANTS OF THE ORIENTAL BAZAAR INVITE YOU TO STOP BY AND SEE THEIR FINE SELECTION OF ORIENTAL IMPORTS. FROM PORCELAIN TO IVORY AND FROM JADE TO SILK, YOU

WILL FIND BARGAINS GALORE, AND MORE! FOR A UNIQUE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE, STOP BY THE ORIENTAL BAZAAR IN SPACES D-THIRTY-ONE THROUGH FORTY-FIVE, JUST NORTH OF THE GRANDSTAND.

When writing a cooperative ad, try to put an equal amount of emphasis on each vendor's product. This isn't too difficult if there is no limitations on wordage, but can be a problem in some markets which limit ads to 25 words or less. In those cases, you will have to make the ad pretty general

Many larger swap meets have extensive budgets for media advertising. One in Florida spends over $60,000 per year on advertising. Another swap meet in Southern California even runs ads on a Tijuana TV station, then runs busses down to the international line to transport shoppers from south of the border. Such ad campaigns are worthwhile, as most vendors will benefit either directly or indirectly from them. However, some vendors may still need to do a little individual advertising, and do it on a limited budget

Undoubtedly the cheapest form of advertising is a business card. Unless you hand them out in wholesale lots, one or two thousand should last at least a year and cost less than the price of dinner for two at a good steak house. If your merchandise is highly unusual, a handout sheet or brochure describing it can be very beneficial. This was discussed earlier, but does deserve to be mentioned again. If you can do the writing and layout yourself, and don't have to use an advertising agency, the production cost can be quite reasonable and well worth the effort. By all means, put a little effort into making it look like a professional handout. A schlocky handout won't help sell good merchandise, and may well detract from it

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Needs!

STOP ENGINE WEAR!

AUTO
MANIA

TOM DIXON & GIL PORTER
SPACES K 11-14, Fri. Sat. Sun.

It seems like any place you find a half dozen houses, a gas station and a convenience market, some enterprising soul is producing a freebie shopper or weekly newspaper. Ad rates in these publications are usually quite reasonable. In the right market area, advertising in them can be effective.

In large metropolitan areas, there are likely to be several weekly or bi-monthly freebies. To determine which would be best for you to advertise in, collect them all and study them just as you would a market. It's often hard to pinpoint the readership of shoppers, but relatively easy in the case of newspapers. One may be obviously slanted toward retirees while another appeals to Yuppies. Yet another may appeal to certain racial or ethnic groups. Merchandise which is slanted toward Hispanics should obviously be advertised in a paper called *Mi Hermano* rather than the *Geriatric Gazette*. If a lot of your business comes from a nearby military base, check and see if there is a base newspaper. If so, does it accept outside advertising?

When trying to choose between two or more shoppers or newspapers, don't be influenced by cost alone. Remember, success isn't necessarily the result of how much you spend on advertising. Far more important is how *effectively* you spend your advertising budget. A $10 ad in one freebie may produce no results at all whereas a $20 ad of the same size in another may bring instant sales. This is usually due to wider distribution or a broader popular appeal. A larger, more expensive ad in the same paper might not bring in any more customers than the smaller one. The only way to determine what size ad is the most cost effective is to try a certain size. If you aren't satisfied with the results, try a larger one. If that still doesn't work, then try advertising in a different publication.

Sometimes it's possible to find an effective method of advertising that doesn't cost anything except time and effort. One vendor who sells top quality Indian goods in the Southwest has a permanent display in a nearby restaurant. Although he has several hundred dollars invested in the inventory for the display, he feels it is well worth it. At the height of the tourist season, literally hundreds of people see his display case every day. Many of them wouldn't think of looking for his type of merchandise at a swap meet — until they see his display. Needless to say, there is a small sign advertising his swap meet location. Restaurant employees receive a commission on anything they sell, and a discount on purchases for themselves. This cuts into the vendor's profit margin on those sales, but he figures it's worth it for the free advertising and increased overall sales.

I started out discussing the merits of word of mouth advertising, and will end with it. When working a summer market, don't neglect to tell people of your winter location, and vice versa. This can be especially important if the two are within a reasonable distance of each other. Last year, we started telling people in the summer market where we spent the winter, which was only about 140 miles away. We were amazed at the number of summer customers who lived nearby, but had never shopped there. Our first weekend back at the winter market, we made a very nice sale to a lady who had first seen us that summer. She had made a special effort to find us.

YOU AND THE IRS

Two things are inevitable in life: death and taxes. While neither can be entirely avoided, it's possible to lessen the blow of both. Longevity can be achieved through a combination of heredity, safe driving habits, taking care of your health, etc. Some taxes simply can't

be avoided, but it's possible to keep your personal income tax bill to a minimum simply by using your head.

When Congress enacted the federal income tax in 1913, it was touted as a "soak the rich" tax. The average American didn't complain, as the base rate started well above his income level. The rich and super rich didn't complain because their tax rates were very low and easily affordable. Besides, the new income tax law contained a number of loopholes designed especially for the benefit of the financial fat cats who controlled the politicians.

Things have certainly changed, haven't they? Over the years, there have been numerous changes in the tax law. Some were supposedly designed to close loopholes for the rich. However, new tax advantages were added. As Congress needed more and more money to finance additional spending, basic tax rates were raised and the bottom level at which taxation started was lowered. Today, the rich and super rich *still* enjoy numerous tax advantages through trusts, foundations, donations to nonprofit organizations, etc. The poor pay little or no income tax because their taxable income level is too low. As inevitably happens, the man in the middle is the one who wound up carrying the majority of the tax burden. The 1986 tax law was touted by Congress as a means of correcting inequities in taxation. The bottom line is that middle class America lost a number of perfectly legitimate deductions and many working people wound up paying more income taxes.

Gone are deductions for interest payments on credit card charges, installment and auto loans, etc. The average American can now deduct only the interest on his home loan. For this reason, many people have refinanced or added a second or third mortgage, using the money they obtained to pay off other loans on which

interest was no longer deductible. The deduction for home loans also applies to second homes, as long as they are used at least two weeks a year and contain cooking, sleeping and bathroom facilities. This second home can be a vacation retreat, motor home, camper, or travel trailer. The latter three can be very important to swap meet vendors who may have to travel to distant markets. Some vendors stay in motels, but this can get very expensive after awhile. An RV which meets the above qualifications is more economical on a day to day basis if you can afford the initial purchase price or down payment.

Some IRS agents and members of Congress began taking a serious look at the second home provision shortly after the 1986 tax law went into effect. The reason was the increase in sales of luxury yachts which qualified under the law as it was written. There may be some changes in the second home interest deduction in future laws, but in one form or another it will probably always be with us. The reason is simple. Congressmen need to maintain two homes themselves, one in their home district and one in Washington. They aren't about to take a tax advantage away from themselves.

Since tax information which might apply at the time of publication could be totally obsolete only a few months or years afterward, I will avoid being too specific in some areas. However, there are a number of facts which are just as valid today as they were 40 years ago, and which will probably still apply for many years to come.

One thing that hasn't changed and probably never will is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance.

Although practiced by many, probably numbering into the millions, income tax evasion is illegal. Many Americans lie when filling out their income tax forms in order

to try to hang onto a few more of their hard-earned dollars. It might be more proper to say they are actually trying to get a larger refund on money which they never saw, as it was withheld from their paychecks. The guy who claims a couple of $10 charitable deductions he never made isn't too likely to get caught or even be audited. As one person put it on April 15th, "It's not the deductions that are real that count, but those that are believable."

A self-employed person who claims a $10,000 annual income, lives in a rundown apartment and drives a rattletrap old car isn't too likely to be questioned by the IRS. This is true no matter what his actual income, as long as it is untraceable. For this reason, some small-time vendors will not take checks or credit cards, but only cash. Actually, most aren't trying to evade the income tax so much as hide their actual income in order to keep their Social Security, Veterans Administration or welfare benefits. Theirs is a unique situation in which one could argue morality vs legality for hours. Are they wrong to accept benefits from tax dollars while earning outside income? Are they right in showing enough ambition to try to supplement their meager government checks, to which in most cases they are otherwise legally entitled? Obviously, their viewpoint will be quite different from that of a bureaucrat, who in some cases may well picture himself as a watchdog of the taxpayer's money.

A person reporting a $10,000 annual income who lives in a beachfront house and drives a Mercedes is asking for trouble. The IRS pays informants to help supply evidence against such blatant cases of tax evasion. Remember, it was the IRS that sent Al Capone to prison. He was able to avoid prosecution and/or conviction on charges ranging from racketeering and extortion to murder. But once the IRS obtained evidence

of his actual vs reported income, his temporary residence at Alcatraz was assured.

Tax avoidance, on the other hand, is perfectly legal. Even the IRS at least pays lip service to the idea. Simply put, it means that you use every legal means possible to avoid paying excess taxes. You take advantage of every possible legitimate deduction and pay only what you are required to pay, not a penny more. Strange as it may seem, there are people serving time in federal prison who would actually have paid less in taxes by practicing tax avoidance rather than tax evasion. They were simply too lazy to exhaust all legal avenues of approach before resorting to trickery.

An employee working for someone else enjoys the fewest advantages when practicing tax avoidance. He or she can claim only the normal deductions and losses, nothing more. A person who is self-employed may or may not have more tax advantages, depending on their particular situation. If that same individual is a salaried employee of his or her own business, however, the picture is somewhat brighter, especially if that business is incorporated.

If your business income warrants it, you should definitely consider incorporation. Some states only require two officers for a corporation, so a husband and wife can incorporate. Other states require more, so check with a corporate and tax attorney rather than trying to incorporate on your own. The latter approach may be cheaper initially, but could cost you in the long run. A good corporate attorney can help you draw up your incorporation papers in such a way that will ultimately save you thousands of dollars in taxes each year. Each individual situation is different, so he will have to tailor the corporation's structure to fit your particular needs. Depending on the time and effort involved, it can cost

anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars to incorporate through an attorney. This is money well spent, as he can point out ways of saving on taxes that the average person would never think of.

Basically, the main advantage to incorporation is this: As your own boss, you can dictate what you as an employee will draw in salary and what you will draw in fringe benefits. In other words, pay yourself a small salary and make up the difference in fringe benefits, which come out of pre-tax dollars. These benefits can include a car and car expenses, health insurance and medical expenses for executives (you and your wife) paid by the corporation, etc. If you have kids in college, you can put them on the payroll and let them pay their tuition out of their salaries. You will lose them as dependents, but can reduce your own salary and put yourself in a lower tax bracket. Since you own the corporation, all these expenses are in reality still coming out of your own pocket, albeit the corporate pocket rather than the personal one. Take advantage of every legal opportunity to reduce your personal income, and thus your personal taxes. Even if your business is relatively small, you may be able to save several thousand dollars a year in this way. One last word on incorporation: avoid a sub-chapter S corporation. Due to recent changes in the tax laws, this type of corporation offers few tax advantages. Take the trouble to go the full incorporation route. You will be glad you did.

If there is a taxable dollar the federal government hasn't found, you can bet state, county and municipal governments are looking for it. Bureaucrats and tax collectors can smell a taxable dollar farther away than a cat can smell a fish market. One of their favorite methods of raising money is through sales taxes, which seem to go up every year despite constant talk of re-

Generally speaking, a guy who cleans out his garage a couple of times a year and hauls the discards to the local swap meet doesn't have to worry about sales tax. However, sales tax laws vary from state to state and city to city. In some states, a professional vendor can set up at small swap meets and not have to worry too much about sales tax. If he works the larger swap meets inside the city limits of a municipality, he will probably have to obtain both a state and city sales tax license.

In California and New York, professionals must obtain a sales tax license before setting up at virtually *any* swap meet. This is strictly enforced and the larger swap meets will even ask to see your license before selling you tickets for your spaces. This applies even to out-of-state vendors who are only setting up for a single weekend. The California Department of Equalization (bureaucratese for tax collectors) will issue a temporary tax license at no cost. The kicker is that they require a tax bond of at least $100 in cash. If you plan to set up regularly at a large market or one of the more lucrative retail specialty shows, the cash bond can run much higher. Even retailers in a permanent storefront location are affected by this pay-in-advance policy of tax collection. If the sales tax they collect each month exceeds a certain amount, they are required to pay an estimated sales tax for the following month, *before* they even collect it.

Having never worked in New York, I have no idea exactly how they work their licensing procedure. If you plan to work swap meets in the Empire State, contact: Department of Taxation and Finance, State Campus, Albany, NY 12227 or telephone (518) 474-2121. Prior knowledge can prevent a lot of headaches later, so contact the sales tax authorities in any state in which you intend to work beforehand. Don't rely on hearsay from another vendor, unless he or she has recently worked

that state and you know they can give you the straight scoop. If you can't find out who to contact in a given state, call the officials at one of the larger swap meets. They can usually at least point you in the right direction.

THE BOTTOM LINE — $ $ $

Up to this point, virtually everything I have said has been aimed at one primary goal — helping you make good money as a swap meet vendor. It may not have seemed like it when the subjects were transportation, the weather and equipment, but the bottom line was still

the profit and loss column. In other words, I have tried to guide you and help you avoid costly mistakes so that you can begin operating in the black as quickly as possible. Now it's time to get down to the nitty gritty — just how much can you make?

The question isn't an easy one to answer, as it depends on a number of factors. Not the least of these is your willingness to work, no matter what the weather might be (up to a point). It's one thing to put in a 9:00 to 5:00 day behind a desk in an air conditioned office. I know from experience that such days can be pretty hectic at times. It's quite another matter to brave a predawn morning temperature of 30 degrees, with 15 mph winds, knowing you may be working at a hectic pace until after sundown. *That's work!*

Some markets are only open on weekends while others are open from 4 to 7 days a week. If yours is a 7 day market, are you willing and able to work all 7 days? If not, how many days can you work? Certain weekdays will in general be better than others. If at all possible, try to work those days. They may not be terribly lucrative, but at the end of season the income from them can add up to a pretty healthy sum. In some markets, weekday sales may be quite poor early or late in the season, but pretty good at its peak. If this is the case in your market, plan on working weekends only at the start or finish, but work the weekdays when they are good. This plan depends, of course, on the swap meet manager letting you miss some days. Some will allow it, some won't. At the very least, you should make space rent plus grocery money on the good weekdays.

Probably the second most important factor for making a good profit is your merchandise. Your success will depend not only on *what* you are selling, but the amount of stock you have, your financial resources to restock

heavily at the height of the season, ready availability of additional stock, etc. Competition, or the lack of it, will also be an important factor. If you have a unique item that sells well and your source of supply is a secret, keep it that way! Remember the old saying, "Monkey see, monkey do." If another vendor sees you are doing well with certain items, he will decide that he should sell them also. More often than not, he will also decide that he can sell at a lower price, thus cutting even further into your sales. For this reason, it's a good idea to have several alternate game plans in the back of your mind. It's better (and more profitable) to stay one jump ahead of the competition than to simply bemoan the fact they are copying your success.

Some vendors who work very large swap meets will have stalls in several locations. This assures that customers who don't walk the entire market are bound to see their merchandise in at least one location. These multiple stalls can help increase both sales and profits, but they also increase overhead. One vendor who has 7 stalls operating at a large swap meet has to take in $4,000 each weekend before he shows a profit. If these stalls are rained out, he has to absorb a *lot* of space rent!

Running additional stalls may appeal to you, but there are some pitfalls to watch out for. First and foremost, get well established in one location *before* trying to expand. Be sure you can get an adequate supply of merchandise, as well as honest, competent help to run additional units. Just about anyone can sell sunglasses and T-shirts. Indian jewelry, computer software and sporting goods are a different story. It takes some knowledge of the subject to be able to sell any of them. Good people who are experienced at swap meet selling are easier to find than you might think. However, beware of the guy who is driving an old rattletrap car and selling someone else's merchandise, yet who claims to know all the good

markets across the country. If he knows that much, why isn't he selling for himself and doing well at it? This guy isn't low profile, he's low performance.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, some vendors will only take cash, usually to hide a substantial part of their income. This practice is self-defeating if you sell high ticket merchandise. Many well-to-do customers don't carry much cash. You can increase your sales dramatically by accepting checks and credit cards. Sure, they leave a paperwork trail for part of your income, but this shouldn't be much of a problem. The increased sales will more than offset any additional taxes you might pay. If you paid attention in the last chapter, you should be able to legally keep your taxes to a minimum anyway. It can be a hassle trying to qualify as a charge card merchant if you don't have a storefront, but the hassle is well worth it.

Other factors which will influence your success are the market itself, the economy in general and the weather. People just don't attend an outdoor swap meet on days that are too hot or too cold, even if it isn't raining. If a lot of people in your area are out of work, that will also influence sales. Proximity to a military base can be a good thing, as military personnel get paid whether times are good or bad.

Above all, don't get discouraged if business is slow when you are first starting out. It takes time to establish any business, and swap meet vending is no exception. Even the best of markets can be slow at the start of the season. Sales can increase dramatically just a few weeks later and remain at a rather high level for several months. Even then, there is bound to be a slow day once in a while. There is simply no way to ensure that sales will be good every single day. For some unexplainable reason, you might do very poorly on a particular

Saturday, even though other vendors are doing well. The situation could reverse itself on Sunday, with your sales far better than normal while others are doing poorly. *The important thing is to maintain a consistently high daily average, no matter what sales are for individual days.* As long as that daily average stays up, a single day that is either very good or very bad doesn't mean a thing.

To demonstrate how this works, let's take a hypothetical couple named Fred and Nancy and follow their first 3 months in the business. They are starting small, but have a slightly desirable product and plan to expand as their business increases. They are working a winter market where many vendors arrive the first weekend in October. At this point, only Saturday and Sunday are decent selling days, so most vendors only set up on weekends. For our purposes, we will make October 1st a Saturday, as that gives a month with 5 weekends. This is an added bonus that occurs a couple of times a year. During their first month, Fred and Nancy post the following sales figures:

1) Sat.,	Oct. 1	$ 18.00
2) Sun.,	Oct. 2	$ 65.00
3) Sat.,	Oct. 8	$ 127.00
4) Sun.	Oct. 9	$ 145.00
5) Sat.,	Oct. 15	$ 178.00
6) Sun.,	Oct. 16	$ 192.00
7) Sat.	Oct. 22	$ 263.00
8) Sun.,	Oct. 23	$ 240.00
9) Sat.	Oct. 29	$ 287.00
10) Sun.,	Oct. 30	$ 210.00

Sales for October total $1745.00, for a daily average of $174.50. After replacing their merchandise and paying space rent, Fred and Nancy don't show much of

a profit for their first month. But notice how sales increase each weekend. Customers are beginning to notice Fred and Nancy, and they are beginning to think in terms of Christmas shopping, so let's see how sales are in November.

1) Sat.	Nov. 5	$ 123.00
2) Sun.	Nov. 6	$ 247.00
3) Sat.	Nov. 12	$ 293.00
4) Sun.	Nov. 13	$ 318.00
5) Sat.,	Nov. 19	$ 436.00
6) Sun.	Nov. 20	$ 362.00
7) Sat.	Nov. 26	$ 497.00
8) Sun.	Nov. 27	$ 353.00

Although Fred and Nancy only work 8 days in November as opposed to 10 in October, they take in nearly $1000 more. Their gross is $2,629, for a daily average of $328.63. At this point, the market has definitely become worthwhile for them. For this reason, they decide to work on Fridays beginning in December. This gives them 13 days of selling, with Christmas Day off. Their December figures are:

1) Fri.,	Dec. 2	$ 178.00
2) Sat.,	Dec. 3	$ 452.00
3) Sun.,	Dec. 4	$ 423.00
4) Fri.,	Dec. 9	$ 316.00
5) Sat.	Dec. 10	$ 342.00
6) Sun.	Dec. 11	$ 468.00
7) Fri.	Dec. 16	$ 512.00
8) Sat.,	Dec. 17	$ 630.00
9) Sun.,	Dec. 18	$ 588.00
10) Fri.,	Dec. 23	$ 358.00
11) Sat.,	Dec. 24	$ 482.00
12) Fri.	Dec. 30	$ 263.00
13) Sat.,	Dec. 31	$ 387.00

December sales total $5,399, for a daily average of $415.31, or almost $100 per day more than November. Fred and Nancy could have gotten discouraged after the first couple of weekends in October. Instead, they persevered until business improved and they were making a comfortable living. While the figures shown were chosen at random, they are fairly indicative of how sales run at a particular medium-sized market, which actually exists. One might think sales would drop off after Christmas, but January through March are actually the best selling months. This is thanks to an influx of winter visitors who stayed home to spend the Christmas holidays with their families.

Generally speaking, sales at a good market should improve to a certain extent as the season progresses, just as Fred and Nancy found. However, sales in some markets may actually decline after the first few weekends. My wife and I once found ourselves in such a market, and didn't get out as quickly as we should have. It was an expensive lesson, but one we will never forget. Give any market you try a reasonable chance, but don't keep hanging on, hoping it will improve. If sales don't increase after a month or so, go on to a different market.

You can also expect your second season in any decent market to be better than your first. Former customers will remember you. They will come back to shop again and/or refer friends to you. It will still be necessary to attract new customers, but the repeats will give you a base on which to build the new season's sales. Unless you have already reached your peak, sales should increase again during the third season. Of course, there will eventually be a certain level of sales that you will never surpass. You may even drop below that level after a few seasons. However, you can raise that upper limit and delay achieving it (and the subsequent downtrend) simply by expanding your variety and stock of merchan-

dise each season. In other words, give the customers something new to look for every year. A variety will also attract customers who might not have been interested in your original merchandise.

Again, I can't tell you exactly how much you can make as a swap meet vendor. That will depend on you and your ability to do everything right. I will repeat: Be in the right place, at the right time, with the right merchandise at the right price. Set a realistic, but high, goal for yourself, then set about achieving that goal. Success won't come overnight, but it might come much sooner than you expect.

YOU, THE CUSTOMER

Swap meet customers number well into the millions each year. Some may attend the local market only once in their lives, just out of curiosity. Others visit it virtually every day it is open. This is especially true of retirees who have nothing else to do, or who just like being

around people. A few come just to browse while others actually plan on doing the majority of their weekly shopping at the swap meet. Some even come late purposely so they can pick through the overripe fruits and vegetables that have been left behind by produce dealers. There is nothing wrong with this practice, as they aren't stealing anything and are certainly cutting down on their food budget.

Many young people also shop swap meets when setting up a new home. Used furniture and appliances can often be found at bargain prices. By shopping wisely, a family working with a limited budget can furnish their home comfortably for very little money. Yuppies might turn up their noses at a couch for $20, but a low-income family with several children will find it a godsend.

Most regular swap meet customers realize the importance of shopping early in the day. This is especially true when searching for used merchandise. With few exceptions, the best items will be sold shortly after the market opens. Of course, there is always that rare "sleeper" that no one else seems to want. Count yourself lucky if you find it later in the day.

As mentioned previously, most vendors who sell new merchandise will have a pretty good selection most of the time. But don't count on it, especially if it's original art or handcrafted items. Many customers will find something they want, but won't buy when they see it because they don't want to carry it around. More often than not, they will return an hour or two later and find that it has been sold. For this reason, it's best to go ahead and buy that one-of-a-kind item when you see it. You can then take it to your car, or ask the vendor to hold it until you return. Most will gladly do so if the item is already paid for, or you have given them a deposit on it.

Just as there are certain rules of conduct for vendors to observe, there are some for customers also. Most who break them do so out of ignorance, but I have seen some examples where the action was deliberate.

First and foremost, treat the vendor's property as you would your own, or better. The worst violation of this I have seen is a case where a woman deliberately ruined a piece of merchandise by running her fingernail over its surface. When a friend asked her if she was going to pay for it, she said, "Why should I? I don't want that #@&*% old thing!" The vendor held his tongue, and heaved a sigh of relief when the miserable creep left his stall. Later, the friend came back and paid for the item, vowing never to bring the other woman to the swap meet again.

Some items are more easily damaged than others, and this should be taken into account when shopping. Don't eat buttered popcorn, greasy French fries or a chili dog, then handle merchandise. Go to the rest room and wash your hands first. If you don't want to take the trouble, then don't touch! When examining merchandise, hold cigarettes, soft drinks and other potentially damaging items away from the vendor's tables. A cigarette ash or drop of Coke can easily ruin an expensive item.

One of Murphy's laws seems to be that the more breakable or easily damaged an item is, the more children are compelled to touch it. Usually they mean no harm, but there is no telling what kind of gooey stuff they might have on their hands. Of course, the ones with sticky fingers aren't happy with touching just one item, they have to touch *everything* in the display. If you are taking small children to a swap meet, caution them *before* you get out of the car not to touch *anything* without permission. It's impossible to watch a child every single minute, and they do forget. If they are

warned often enough, and punishment inflicted when that warning is ignored, they will usually get the message. If they don't, leave them at home.

Small children should not be allowed to run loose, but should be kept within easy reach of parents at all times. This is more easily said than done, especially if a parent is intent on examining some merchandise. One solution is to have a wrist strap or harness and leash on the child. Some people think this is cruel, but it's actually a good idea as well as a precautionary factor. I have yet to hear of a child being kidnapped at a swap meet, but it *could* happen. Lost children, on the other hand, are a common problem. All too often I have seen a small child standing alone, crying its eyes out because Mommy and Daddy are nowhere in sight. Usually they are reunited within a few minutes, but they can be frantic minutes for parent and child alike.

A particularly common offense is customers who cut through vendor's spaces. For reasons of safety and security, very few vendors allow customers behind their tables. Usually the offender means no harm and doesn't even realize that he or she is doing anything wrong. They simply see an item that interests them on the next aisle and want to take the shortest possible route. Others, however, are insensitive slobs who simply don't care. I have seen them deliberately crawl between security ropes which bore a sign stating "This In Not An Aisle." They then proceed to crawl over the vendor's tables, knocking one over in the process, and kept on going. Such people deserve a good tongue-lashing, and the louder the better. If they suddenly find a dozen or so people staring intently at them, they may get the message and improve their behavior. But don't count on it. They would be highly offended if someone cut through their house on the way to a neighbor's, but view cutting through a vendor's stall as "different."

Vendors who sell large, high ticket items often keep their better pieces on a separate table behind their main ones. This is to prevent potential damage or theft. If such a piece interests you, it is perfectly alright to ask to examine it closer. Sensing a potential large sale, the vendor will usually either hand you the piece or invite you to step behind the main tables for a closer look. Wait for an invitation, however, don't assume that it's okay merely because you want to satisfy your curiosity. This is especially true if you are *only* curious, and the vendor is very busy.

Many otherwise honest people seem to get a secret thrill out of shoplifting and would be offended if called a criminal. However, shoplifting *is* a crime, and one that costs retail merchants several billions of dollars a year. More often than not, the shoplifter doesn't need the stolen item or even want it. All they want is the excitement of doing something wrong without getting caught. If they are caught and prosecuted, they quickly change their tune. The thrill suddenly loses its lustre when faced with a potential criminal record. Most swap meet vendors are pretty adept at spotting shoplifters. Many are willing to prosecute if they think there is a good chance of conviction. They are more interested in creating an object lesson for other shoplifters than recovering the stolen goods, which are often of small value. Even if the vendor doesn't prosecute, he will quickly spread a shoplifter's description up and down the aisles. Sooner or later their luck will run out.

Although a sequel is seldom equal, this chapter can be ended with The Return Of Sylvester Skinflint, a character first encountered in *Bug Thy Neighbor*. Sylvester is such a common topic of conversation among vendors that he does deserve a return engagement. In the earlier encounter, he was featured as being either a regular

customer or another vendor. For our purposes here, he will be considered strictly a customer.

One of Sylvester's major problems is that he is a cheapskate. Another is that he always uses the wrong approach in trying to get a better price.

First, Sylvester doesn't realize that there is a difference between day vendors and professionals. A day vendor is usually just cleaning out his attic or garage and disposing of unwanted items. If he makes a few bucks, he's happy. He usually expects to bargain on prices and can be very negotiable. If he has a price of $10 on a used end table, he may accept half that amount. He is more concerned with driving home in an empty pickup that night than making a lot of money.

Professionals, on the other hand, are just that — professionals. They work swap meets in order to make money. Some are merely trying to supplement an already adequate retirement income. Others derive their entire living from swap meets. Many vendors fall into the latter category, yet Sylvester fails to realize this. He becomes highly indignant if they don't accept his offer, which is well below the asking price. He would be even more indignant if his employer cut his wages or Congress reduced his Social Security benefits!

When dealing with professionals, Sylvester doesn't realize there is a right way and a wrong way to ask for a lower price. Unfortunately, a lot of other customers don't understand this, either. They also fail to realize that a professional vendor who has a lot of competition is more likely to negotiate than one who has none — unless his prices are already lower than those of his competitors. Most vendors have also heard every pitch there is for a bargain, so don't think yours is a new one.

Generally speaking, the following phrases are almost guaranteed to produce a negative reaction from a professional who has just quoted you a price (along with his possible mental comeback in parentheses):

"You've gotta be kidding!" *(No lady, that's the price. Don't expect top quality for bottom dollar.)*

"That's too much! What's the best possible price you can give me?" *(The price that's marked is the best I can do.)*

"I won't pay that much. You've gotta do better than that." *(Same commentary as above.)*

"I can buy it cheaper over on the next aisle." *(Then buy it there.)*

"Since it's the end of the day, will you sell it any cheaper?" *(Lady, I sold over 100 of those today at full price. Why should I give you a deal?)*

"I'll wait until next week, maybe it'll be cheaper then." *(Even if I have it next week, it will still be full price.)*

"That's ridiculous! My brother-in-law bought one in 1953 and didn't pay half that much." *(How would you like to go back to living on the wages you made in 1953?)*

"Can't you give a better price to a veteran?" *(Big deal. Half the vendors out here are veterans. Some are even POW's who were wounded in action. A couple of my best buddies still suffer ill effects from wounds suffered over 40 years ago.* They *aren't asking any special favors, just a chance to make a living.)*

If there is one single approach that is hated more than any other, it's "I'll *give* you (your offer)." I don't know a single vendor who will accept that type of offer. Most

have a pretty good comeback for it, but one lady has the best I've ever heard. In this case, Sylvester said he would "give" here $45 for a $65 clock. She replied, "Mister, go down to the supermarket and buy $65 worth of groceries. After the clerk has rung them up, tell her you'll give her $45. If she accepts your offer, you can have that clock for $45." Sylvester didn't say anything, but his eyes got wider and wider as he backed away from her stall. Obviously, he got the message.

It's a free country, and you have the right to ask for a lower price. But don't automatically expect one just because you asked. Above all, don't storm off in a huff, then come back later and ask a vendor if he is ready to accept your offer. Believe me, he won't be. A far better approach is to ask in a very courteous manner, and thank him for his time if he refuses. If you are negotiating on a high ticket item, but can't reach an agreement, smile and say you will think about it. That will give the vendor a chance to think it over, also. If you return later, your chances of negotiating a mutually agreeable price may be greater. This is especially true if the previous negotiations were conducted in a friendly manner. Never infer that a vendor's merchandise isn't worth the price. Instead, use the approach that the asking price is fair enough, but you just can't afford it. Some approaches that *might* work would include:

> "It's a gift and I hadn't intended to spend quite that much. Could you possibly take any less?"
>
> "That sure is nice, but I simply can't afford it right now. Would you consider selling it for a little less?"
>
> "Actually, I need several of these for a wall arrangement. Could you possibly give me a better price on several?"

Notice that all of the above are positive approaches, made in a courteous manner. The last is the one most likely to work, especially if you indicate high ticket items. Sensing a potentially large sale, some vendors will bend a little, even if they have already had a very successful day. They know the customer *might* ultimately pay the full price, but he might not. One gentleman used that approach on us, and we offered him a small discount. He readily agreed. Both parties were happy, as he felt he had gotten a bargain and we were able to turn the merchandise much more quickly than anticipated.

In another case, the customers were a young professional couple who were decorating a new home. They inquired as to the price of our most expensive piece. After hearing the price, they explained that it was a little beyond their budget. In a very nice way, they asked if we were negotiable. I told them we could probably come down a little bit. The lady made an offer that was less than 1/3 the asking price, but said it in such a cute way that I wasn't offended. In fact, her tone of voice indicated she was hopeful but knew darn well I wouldn't accept. We dickered back and forth for a few minutes, but couldn't come to terms. They thanked me for my time, said goodbye, and left.

A few minutes later they returned with a "final offer." Again, it was presented in a very courteous manner. I came down a little on my asking price, and we dickered a little more until we reached a figure that was mutually acceptable. The end result was the young couple got an exceptional piece of work at a price they could live with. I'm sure it's the focal point of their living room decor. However, they never would have gotten it if they had tried the Sylvester Skinflint approach.

PUBLICATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS AND SOURCES

Just as with any other profession, there are several publications which are oriented directly toward swap meet vendors. There are also some others which can be of value, although they are more general in appeal. In fact, they are actually downright necessary if you plan

to travel from market to market rather than remaining stationary.

If your primary market is highly seasonal, you will have no choice but to find another during the off season. The very first thing you will need is a road map for each state you plan to visit. Although individual state maps can be very helpful, a good road atlas is even better, if for no other reason than it's harder to lose. Rand McNally's is excellent, and can be found in most book stores. It contains maps of all 50 states, plus Canada and Mexico. Also included are street maps of many major U.S. cities. These are very simplified and show only the main arteries, but they are better than nothing.

If you have an RV and plan to stay at campgrounds as you travel cross country, invest in a good campground directory. These are available at most RV supply stores and can sometimes be found in general book stores. By all means join AAA. The services they offer are well worth the price, even if you never have a roadside emergency. Their maps (both state and city) are free, as are their Tourbooks. These alone can be worth several times the annual membership fee.

There are at least 4 directories available which list numerous swap meets. As mentioned previously, none of them lists every single market, yet each is worth having for reference purposes. These are:

Clark's Flea Market, USA, 2516 Cotton Patch Lane, Milton, FL 32570. Published quarterly. $18 per year, or $5 per single copy by mail, including postage. Can also be found at many larger swap meets. Cover price is $3. In addition to information on markets, it contains listings of dealer's auctions, plus ads from a number of wholesalers.

The Official Directory To U.S. Flea Markets, The House of Collectibles, 201 East 50th Street, New York, NY

10022. Single copy price $4.95. Distributed by Ballantine Books, this guide can be found in better book stores nationwide. It contains no advertising and lists only the markets which are best for antiques and collectibles. However, the information on these markets is very complete.

The Great American Flea Market Directory, Fair Times, Sub Dept., PO Box 455, Arnold, MO 63010. Published twice a year. $5 per copy plus 75¢ postage. Contains numerous market listings plus lots of ads from wholesalers.

Swap Meet U.S.A., PO Box 200, Grover City, CA 93433. Published twice a year. Subscription is $8, or $4 for a single copy. Also available at many larger markets. Contains numerous market listings plus ads from equipment/fixture suppliers and wholesalers.

All information on the above was correct at the time of publication. However, subscription prices and publication schedules can change. If you can't find a recent copy, query before subscribing. All subscription prices are, of course, in U.S. funds. A fifth publication which can prove invaluable is *Dealer's Desk Reference,* which is available for $35 from Fair Times, listed above. This annual directory doesn't list any swap meets, but does list rodeos, fairs, arts & crafts shows, auto shows, etc. Many vendors work these markets during the off season. Depending on their particular merchandise and the market itself, some do very well at this while others practically starve. Again, know your market!

The two organizations with which I am familiar that can be of benefit are Independent Dealers Association Of America and Western Fairs Association. Practically speaking, neither organization will do you much good if you strictly work swap meets. An exception is their group rates for liability insurance. If you wish to work

fairs, rodeos, special events, etc., you may wish to join one or both. Whether or not membership is worthwhile is a highly individual matter. If you need their services and utilize them, it's worth it. If you don't, it's not.

For membership information, contact Independent Dealers Association at PO Box 455, Arnold, MO 63010. Western Fairs Association may be contacted at PO Box 160448, Sacramento, CA 95816.

Sources for merchandise can be found in 3 of the 4 directories listed above. There are also a couple of monthly newspapers devoted almost exclusively to ads for wholesalers. These feature both general and specialty merchandise and complimentary copies are usually available at the offices of larger swap meets. If you work a smaller market and can't find them, they are:

Vendor's Guide, PO Box 399, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159-0399. Subscription rate is $20 for 12 issues. Although mostly ads, also contains some short but very informative articles on current trends in sales, etc. These articles just might help you stay one jump ahead of the competition with the hottest sellers.

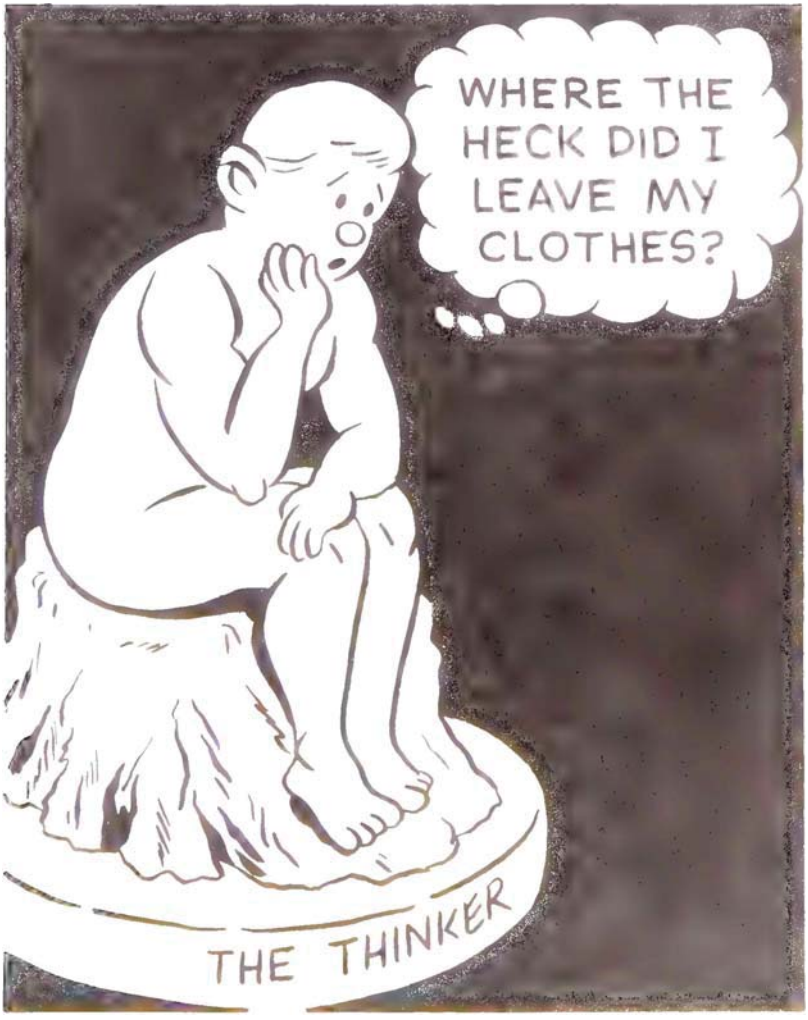
Swap Meet Merchandising, PO Box 26161, Encino, CA 91316. Subscription rate is $20 for 12 issues. All ads, but what ads! Just about every type of general merchandise is listed.

If you specialize in American Indian handicrafts of any type, another publication which is invaluable is:

The Indian Trader, PO Box 1421, Gallup, NM 87301. Published monthly. Subscription rate is $15 for 12 issues. Plenty of wholesale ads, plus numerous extremely interesting articles on Indian

artists and craftsmen, the Old West, etc. A thoroughly outstanding publication for anyone with *any* interest in American Indians.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS



As the title implies, this chapter is a potpourri of miscellaneous information and thoughts. A few of these just didn't fit naturally into any other chapter. Others occurred to me long after the appropriate chapter had been completed. In a couple of instances, new inform-

ation became available at the last minute. Please bear with me if I seem to jump from one subject to another. One may seem unrelated to the next, but all are important enough to be presented here, even if in a somewhat random manner.

First and foremost, everyone who has been in the business for any length of time agrees that swap meets aren't what they used to be. Had I known then what I know now, I would have gotten into the business 10 years ago, or even 20. In those days, a good selling day at the better markets was counted in the thousands of dollars. Today it is in the hundreds, which is still good enough to be worthwhile.

Despite a general decline in the business, it is entirely possible for a new vendor to make the grade. If he does everything right, and the breaks are with him, he can even become wealthy. One of the surest ways to succeed is to examine all the available evidence, then anticipate the next upward swing in specialty items. My wife and I recently attended a large trade show. After examining some of the new lines being shown, I am virtually certain I know what one hot seller will be, at least in our area. It won't be a fad either, but a trend that should be good for a couple of years or more. We are seriously considering expanding into that area in a small way, even though it is only vaguely related to our present merchandise. It isn't that we lack the confidence to make a complete change. We simply won't because our sales figures show we already have a winner on our hands, with sales increasing steadily, so we are still expanding that line.

In the chapter entitled *The Bottom Line — $$$,* I briefly mentioned expanding by adding other selling units. After becoming solidly established, we added a second unit this summer. They worked one section of

the country while we worked another. The couple running it are honest, hard-working and very gung-ho for the product. The only disadvantages we have encountered from the distance between units are shipping costs and lack of instant communications. The advantages, however, are far more important. First, they have broken into some virtually untapped, but lucrative, markets with no competition. Second, the distance vastly decreases the possibilities of both units being rained out the same weekend (it's only happened once.)

A third unit is all set to start operation within a few weeks. They will work the same swap meet we do in the winter, but at the opposite end of the grounds. In the summer, they will go to yet another section of the country. At least during the winter months, we will be able to hand deliver merchandise to them and communicate by walkie-talkie.

If we should ever add a fourth unit, it will work in an entirely different area. We have already been approached by a good prospect who wants to sell for us, and I could hardly believe my ears when he first broached the subject. He is one of the more successful and well-known vendors in our winter market. I had no idea he was interested in changing merchandise and locations.

Once your business is large enough, and you have the capital to do it, you may want to expand into fairs, arts & crafts shows, etc., as mentioned in the preceding chapter. The major disadvantages are the high cost, the need for a *much* larger inventory, and lack of experience at working those markets. Talk to other vendors who have tried them and get their reactions. Some will say they are good while others will disagree vehemently. Who is actually right? They all are, based on their own experiences. Weigh the evidence, then draw your own conclusions. But one word of advice: Don't try an

expensive, unknown market unless you can afford to gamble. You won't get rich playing safe, but you will at least eat. If you do decide to gamble, keep in mind that you may have to raise prices to cover the added expense of travel, entry fees, etc.

If you are seriously considering working fairs and shows, invest a little money in postage and telephone calls to contact the appropriate officials. Set up a filing system for the information they send you, and use it! Study the information when you receive it, then file it for a couple of weeks. Take it out and study it again. An event which looked good earlier may not be so appealing now, and vice versa.

Bear in mind that some arts & crafts shows are open only to people selling their own work. Others allow professional dealers who are selling handcrafted items, even though they didn't make them. A few will allow anyone who can pay the entry fee, no matter what they are selling. Fortunately, the latter type of show is rare. A vendor selling skateboards or cheap imported luggage certainly doesn't enhance an arts & crafts show's image.

A filing system for merchandise catalogs, price sheets, etc., is also a good idea. You may only use one supplier to start, but should have as much information on others as you can gather. You never know when you may want to add a new line, or change merchandise altogether. Study the catalogs carefully, then make notes as to which items you would like to order first and which will come later.

As I watch the sky outside and try to get a weather report on the local radio, I am suddenly aware of the need for a weather radio. Radio Shack and other electronics stores sell them, and they aren't very expensive. They can be tuned to the same weather frequencies pilots use, and are far more accurate and comprehensive than

ordinary radio and TV weather reports. One reason is because they are updated every hour. A friend of mine uses one and swears it is accurate 90 percent of the time.

A couple of other items that should have been included in *Equipment and Supplies,* but weren't, are a pair of work gloves and some comfortable shoes. Gloves are very handy when setting up and tearing down. You may also need them to keep your hands clean when changing a tire. The shoes should have good arch supports, as you will be on your feet most of the day. Personally, I prefer cowboy boots for everyday wear. On work days, however, I forego them in favor of a good pair of walking shoes, which are easier on both my back and my feet.

Most stores have a check cashing policy, and you should have one, too. The same applies for a minimum purchase if you take credit cards. We don't cash checks outright, but will accept them in payment for merchandise. This even applies to traveler's checks. Our minimum purchase for credit cards is $10, the same as most stores. Although it is good business to accept checks and credit cards, you are under no obligation to be a money changer for customers. If someone doesn't want to buy anything, but wants you to change a $100 bill, feel free to refuse. Even if they offer you one for a small purchase, there is nothing wrong with asking if they have anything smaller. In many cases they do, but want to break the larger bill. Simply tell them that breaking a hundred would strip you of change. Most people will understand.

In *Effective Merchandising,* I discussed the importance of having an eye-catching display. There can be no arguing its overall value, but it must be weighed in the light of the time it takes you to set up and tear down.

if you spend most of your time at these tasks, with little time for selling, it's counterproductive. Remember, your main business is to sell, not be the showpiece of the swap meet. However, if just a few minutes extra makes the difference between a drab display and an attractive one, then take the extra time. It should improve sales [illegible]

There are a couple of scams which we have seen in our travels that are prevalent enough to warrant mention here. One is usually pulled at swap meets while the other is most common on the east west Interstate system, especially along I-40 and I-8 in the West. We have seen this one all the way from Albuquerque to San Diego.

The first con game involves an Indian 'craftsman' we will call Yah-Tah-Hey Yazzie (derived from the Navajo word for "hello" and a common Navajo surname). Yah-Tah-Hey will approach a vendor's stall with a sack in his hand and ask if the vendor is interested in buying any Indian jewelry. Sometimes he will offer just a glimpse of the sack's contents to arouse interest. Since Indian jewelry is quite popular, his chances of an ignorant vendor [illegible]

If the vendor asks for a better look, Yah-Tah-Hey will then withdraw a sample and give a short speech about how he has been making jewelry for years, uses only the finest turquoise, etc. He will say that he usually gets a much higher price for his work, but is short of money and needs some right away to buy more raw silver and stones, or maybe his child is sick and needs medicine. He is a master of psychology, knowing that most people like to get something for nothing. They also like to help someone in distress. If the vendor knows virtually nothing about Indian jewelry, he may take the bait and buy. He will later say, "I know it's authentic, because I

bought it from the Indian who made it." Welcome to the world of nickel silver and plastic turquoise from Taiwan!

This scam has even been pulled in Indian-owned stores on the reservation, and more than one Indian has been known to buy a made-in-Mexico rug of traditional design, then try to peddle it as their own work. Naturally, the price is inflated far beyond the rug's actual value. Indians aren't stupid, and they learn the white man's larcenous ways fast!

Yah-Tan-Hey Yazzie and his cohorts are a discredit to their people and the human race in general. Worst of all, they make things just that much tougher for the many thousands of honest Indian craftspeople who work very hard to make a living. Many of them spend years perfecting their craft and developing a recognizable personal style, yet only a few can ever command the prices their work deserves. Most are lucky if they can make minimum wage.

If you are planning to buy (either for yourself or for resale) any type of Indian-made items, deal only with a reputable jobber, whether white or Indian. None will knowingly sell or otherwise misrepresent fakes. A few have unwittingly gotten stuck with counterfeits, but this rarely happens. Most Indian traders are third or fourth generation members of the profession who will see to it that both you and the craftsman get a fair deal. After all, their own livelihood depends on it.

The second scam is of the "we need help" variety. In this one, the con artists don't single out any particular intended victim. They use the shotgun approach, which has a potential for greater profits because they can bilk several people in one location. They simply pull into a busy rest stop on the Interstate, post a note in the rest room and wait. The note usually reads something like this:

Please help us! We are trying to get to San Jose, where my grandmother is due to have her leg amputated. We have no money for food or gas. We did have ample money for the trip, but my purse was stolen in Gallup, along with every cent we had. I am so weak from hunger that I have no milk to nurse the baby. Any help will be appreciated, as we need to be by Grandmother's side to comfort her. She is very distraught that she will no longer be able to pursue her career as a ballerina. We are in the white station wagon at the end of the parking area.

Really tears at your heartstrings, doesn't it? If poor old Grandma and a hungry baby don't get you, try Version No. 2. In this one, the husband has a job waiting for him in Anaheim (or Dallas, Los Angeles, Denver, etc.). The money for the trip wasn't stolen, but every last cent was spent on car repairs in Albuquerque. Version No. 3 may contain a death in the family as the reason for traveling. There will be minor variations in the notes, but for all practical purposes they are identical in basic content.

As an added touch of appeal to the soft-hearted, the family pulling this one may have a Holy Bible displayed conspicuously on the dashboard. However, one quick look at the people in the car will tell you that they probably couldn't name a single book of the Bible and have likely never seen the inside of a church.

In one case, a woman actually approached my wife with a naked baby in her hands, claiming they had run out of gas and had no money for gas *or* diapers. As an added touch to tear at the heartstrings, the baby was covered with a bad rash. The woman looked sweet enough, and anyone would feel sorry for a naked baby in the hot July sun. The image was one to make Attila

the Hun weep with compassion. It was thoroughly shattered, however, when my wife glanced in the open car door. There sat Ned Neanderthal, arms hanging loose and knuckles dragging the ground. My wife told the woman we were broke, too, and barely had enough gas to get home ourselves (it really had been a bad weekend). The woman got into the car which was "out of gas" and closed the door. Ned started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot like he was on his way to the Indy 500. We were just a few seconds later and took full advantage of the recently enacted 65 mph speed limit, yet never did catch up with them. It was over 60 miles to the nearest spot where they could have filled their "empty" gas tank. Our truck should go empty like that!

People who pull scams like that certainly don't inspire you to stop and help those who actually need it. Real breakdowns never occur conveniently at rest stops, but in the middle of nowhere, which makes the situation even more pathetic

Before leaving the subject of vehicles, let me say they can often help you find a good restaurant in a strange town. Simply look for the one that has the largest number of vehicles with local license plates parked out front. This is especially true if they are pickups. Locals always know where to get the most and best food at the lowest price

In closing, let me repeat that no one can tell you how well you will do as a swap meet vendor. You will have to find out for yourself. I have tried to help you avoid some pitfalls and do as many things as possible correctly, right from the start. Don't get discouraged if business is a little slow at first. Remember, a day at the swap meet is like a ball game. It isn't over until the whistle blows!

GLOSSARY

There are several words, phrases and terms common to retailing in general and swap meets in particular which are not ordinarily encountered outside the trade. Even if you do run across them, they will probably have another meaning which is closer to the dictionary definition. While a few are explained briefly in the text,

they are repeated here for quick reference. Others appear only in this glossary, but they are words which you will encounter when talking to other vendors and with which you should be familiar.

Awning. Often used interchangeably with canopy, but generally used to describe a nylon or canvas screen which is attached to the side of an RV. It can be unrolled to provide protection from the sun or rain, with one end remaining attached to the RV.

Bungie Chords. These handy little items are seldom encountered outside swap meets, auto or motorcycle supply stores. Basically, they are a short length of chord with a large hook on each end. Vendors use them for a variety of purposes too numerous to list here. Motorcyclists use them to secure loads to the back of their bikes. They are almost a necessity for everyone who works an outdoor swap meet.

Canopy. Generally used to describe a nylon or canvas cover, including metal support poles, which provides protection from sun and rain. If you use one, anchor it and weight it down. On windy days, canopies make wonderful sails.

Clamp. Basically, a large metal clothespin (or alligator clip without teeth) which has rubber or plastic tips on handles and jaws. They are available in several sizes and are indispensible for a number of uses.

Contract Vendor. A professional vendor who works a particular swap meet on a permanent or seasonal basis. His contract guarantees him the same space or spaces to ensure customers will know where to look for him each week.

Cut Your Losses and Run. A term used to describe knowing when it's time to quit, usually if you are operating at a loss. You might work several weekends in a poor market, or set up and have only a few sales

before heavy rains begin to fall. In either case, you most likely haven't even made expenses, and probably won't. So you cut your losses and run before the situation deteriorates further.

Day Vendor. Anyone who sets up at a swap meet for a single day or weekend. Usually applied to non-professionals who are cleaning out the attic or garage, but can also mean a professional who moves from market to market and has no permanent selling location.

Discount Game. A method in which a merchant attempts to delude the customer into thinking he is getting a bargain. The retailer will usually double the normal selling price of an item, then display a "50% Off" sign. This gimmick is as old as the hills, but as P.T. Barnum said, "There's a sucker born every minute." The gullible public still falls for it. This practice is extremely common among retailers who sell Indian jewelry and handicrafts, both at swap meets and in retail stores. It should not be confused with legitimate sales, or instances where a vendor actually is selling top quality, brand name merchandise below the normal selling price. Due to high volume and low overhead, many swap meet vendors are able to sell well below actual retail and still make a profit. They don't play the discount game, but really do offer outstanding value for the money.

Fixtures. Normally used to describe lighting, shelves, display stands, etc., in retail stores. At swap meets, it would apply to the above, plus tables and the like.

Flea Market. An outdoor market where used goods are bought and sold, according to the dictionary. My definition is that it's a place where tightwads go to buy junk, both new and used.

Gross. The amount a vendor takes in during any given period, before costs are taken out. A gross figure can be

very misleading when trying to calculate a vendor's actual success. It's not what he grosses, but what his profit is that counts.

Keystone. The practice of doubling a wholesale price to determine the retail price. However, a retailer who keystones doesn't actually double his money. After he pays all expenses and replaces merchandise, his profit is much smaller.

Market. A swap meet, flea market, arts & crafts show, seasonal festival, or wherever a vendor sells, including the general area, as in "Winterhaven is a good market in the summer."

Markup. The actual difference between wholesale and retail prices, or percentage thereof. A 50% markup is a keystone.

Net. Actual profit after a retailer pays all expenses, including replacement of merchandise. If he pays $15 for an item, sells it for $30, and has expenses of $10, he actually nets $5.

Profit. Same basic definition as above.

Rain Check. At the supermarket, they will give you a rain check for a sale item which is sold out, even on a sunny day. In swap meet circles, a rain check means your space rent will be credited to a future date if you are rained out on a day for which you have already paid. Some swap meets give rain checks, but most larger ones don't. They have to pay the lease, whether they collect or not. Don't count on rain checks.

Salesperson. A person who does the actual selling at a swap meet, whether they are the vendor or not. A salesperson may be only an employee (salaried or on commission) of a vendor.

Setup. A vendor's actual physical space and its contents, including his space or spaces, fixtures and merchandise.

The term is sometimes used to describe only the latter two. Not to be confused with set up, which is the act of erecting the fixtures and putting the merchandise on display.

Source of Supply. Wholesaler, manufacturer or craftsperson who supplies an individual vendor with merchandise, as in "His source of supply is too far away."

Space. Actual ground area with predetermined boundaries occupied by a vendor. There is no set standard for space sizes from one swap meet to another. A space may measure 9' x 16' at one swap meet, 20' square at another. An end space is one at either end of a row and the most desirable location. An inside space is any that is located between end spaces, even when it is outdoors.

Stall. Depending on context, this term can be interchangeable with setup and does not necessarily mean an actual stall such as in a barn. It may also refer to a particular space.

Swap Meet. Usually has the same meaning as flea market, but the term has a better connotation. To me, a swap meet is a place where canny shoppers go to find better types of merchandise, both new and used.

Unit. An individual vendor's setup or stall (or multiples thereof), plus employees and vehicles, as in "He operates 7 units throughout the state."

Vendor. An individual who sells at swap meets, or who owns setups at them. A day vendor usually does his own selling. A contract vendor may sell, or may only attend to administrative details and oversee his salespeople.

Zip. A very unpopular word with vendors, as it describes a day in which they set up, but didn't make a single sale, as in "We did zip on Friday, but had a great day Saturday."